Management in Government

February 1984 Volume 39 Number 1

Management in Government

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Management Services in Government

Produced by the Cabinet Office (Management and Personnel Office) in collaboration with Her Majesty's Treasury and other departments and published quarterly by Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

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First published 1984

ISBN 0 11 722719 6
ISSN 0263-4678

Front cover: A view of the new HMSO Publications Centre in Nine Elms Lane.

Management in Government
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Contents

Page

2 The Work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
Sir Cecil Clothier KCB, QC

9 The New HMSO Publications Centre
G Turner

17 Personnel Management in the Civil Service: an Overview
Earl of Gowrie

29 New Approaches to Personnel Management in the Ministry of Defence
R M Hastie-Smith

43 Succession Planning
C V Peterson

48 Fast Stream Training at the Civil Service College
J W Thompson

55 Britain's Reciprocal Exchange Courses with Europe: Where Do We Go From Here?
Mrs J Waldron

59 Management in the Civil Service: a Trainer's View and Some Research Findings
A C Manning

69 Is the Civil Service Interested in Information Technology?
J Stone

75 Royal Commissions and Departmental Committees of Inquiry

76 Civil Service Courses and Seminars

The Work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

Sir Cecil Clothier KCB QC

Sir Cecil began his career as a barrister in 1950 and later sat as a Recorder and then as a Deputy High Court Judge. In 1972 he was appointed Judge of Appeal of the Isle of Man from which post he resigned in January 1979 to take up his present appointment as Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner.

The Office of Parliamentary Commissioner is now so well established as part of the UK Constitution that it may come as a surprise to some to learn that it has been in existence for only 16 years. Equally surprising perhaps is the fact that we (a nation priding ourselves on our defence of the democratic rights of the individual) should have been some 150 years behind the first of the Scandinavians (Sweden in 1809) in setting up what has been described as 'the people's tribune and the citizen's friend'. Perhaps the most important reason for this is that until the Crichel Down case in 1954 (where the government failed to act as promised, in regard to land it no longer required) the traditional role of the Member of Parliament in taking up his constituent's grievance against the executive was thought to be sufficient. But the Franks Report* in 1957 favoured the setting up of machinery 'for hearing appeals against administrative

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Management in Government 1984 (1) 2–8
**Administrative Tribunals and Enquiries,* Cmnd 218, HMSO, 1957

decisions generally'; this was followed by the Wyatt Report of 1962[1] which in turn led to the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967.

Although the intention of the Act was to give Members of Parliament a 'better instrument which they can use to protect the citizen' the creation of the Office of PCA was not unanimously welcomed in Parliament. It may be that some MPs feared that an Ombudsman might usurp their traditional role; so it is no surprise that the Act provided that access to the Ombudsman was only to be had through an MP. Such a limitation on access has been a matter of controversy ever since.

Powers and procedures

Before describing some of the effects which the work of this Office has had on public administration in this country, I think it may help to remind readers of my powers and procedures.

The first requisite for an investigation to be undertaken is the referral of a complaint by a member of the public claiming to 'have sustained injustice in consequence of maladministration in connection with' the administrative actions of a department or authority subject to my jurisdiction. Neither of the terms 'maladministration' or 'injustice' is defined in the Act, though in practice they are not difficult to recognise. And there are other hurdles for the complainant to surmount. On average, 70–75 per cent of all complaints referred to me each year will fail the 'screening' test by which I determine whether the complaint is one I can investigate. My Annual Report for 1982[2] shows that 574 complaints were rejected that year for various reasons: the authorities complained against were outside jurisdiction; the complaint did not concern administrative actions; the aggrieved had a right of appeal to a tribunal; the complaint concerned contractual or commercial matters or was about public service personnel matters; or there was simply no evidence of maladministration or personal injustice in the complaint.

Once the complaint has passed the 'screen' the investigation proper begins. I start by sending to the Principal Officer of the department complained against a statement of the complaint, with a request for his comments. The Act requires that I should first give the Principal Officer an opportunity to comment in this way. The response time varies between departments: it can be as short as three weeks or as long as three months–but much depends on the complexity of the complaint and the amount of research that the department needs to carry out in order to give a full reply. Once I

[1] *The Citizen and the Administration,* Stevens and Sons, 1961.
[2] HCP257, Session 1982–83, HMSO, 1983.

receive this reply I call for the department's papers and start the detailed investigation. These papers may in themselves be sufficient for me to arrive at a conclusion. But if the records are deficient or there are conflicts of evidence, departmental officials, as well as the complainant himself, and anyone in the country who knows something about the matter, may be interviewed by my officers. And if irreconcilable conflicts emerge I have the power to hear evidence on oath from the complainant and the departmental officials concerned and occasionally I do so.

At the conclusion of the investigation I send my report to the Member who referred the complaint, to the department and to any official named in the complaint and that is usually the end of the matter. I publish four volumes of selected cases each year, and occasionally matters of general interest are the subject of a special report to Parliament. In some cases, however, publication of my report may lead to further enquiries, frequently involving the Principal Officer of the department, for the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner exists to support and oversee my work and to consider whether further action by Parliament is needed in order to put right what, for example, I may see as a continuing administrative failure likely to lead to injustice.

PCA reports

It is now generally accepted that the reports of my investigations are of considerable value to departments in identifying administrative problems. However, I am not sure that previous generalisations based upon the experience of my Office are of much practical use. It is a trite observation that failures of communication have a part, and usually a central part, to play in most justified complaints. Rather, I think it might be more instructive if I illustrate the effect of my work with some examples.

Nearly one-quarter of all my work is about tax, the citizen complaining about all manner of errors alleged to have been committed by the Inland Revenue. The White Paper (Cmnd 4729)[1] made provision for remission of tax in cases of official error and was published in July 1971, following strong pressure from the Select Committee (using evidence provided by this office)[2] which argued that remission on the ground of exceptional hardship alone was insufficient. The Select Committee in the same report also referred to the

[1] *First Report from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. Observations by the Government,* HMSO, 1971.
[2] *First Report from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration,* HCP 240, Session 1970–71, HMSO, 1971.

fact that delayed repayments of tax did not carry interest and they returned to that subject in their report published in June 1972[1]. Although the government turned down the recommendations when they made their observations in February 1973[2], pressure was maintained and eventually an appropriate remedy appeared in the Finance (No 2) Act 1975. The work of the PCA in changing departmental practice in the same field is further illustrated by my predecessor's special report of October 1979[3] to the Select Committee about the working of the 1971 White Paper provisions. He underlined his concern that pensioners appeared to be particularly badly affected by the discovery of tax arrears at a time when they can least afford to pay them. The Select Committee endorsed this report and took up the matter with the Principal Officer of the Inland Revenue; the government's response was to introduce, with effect from 20 March 1981, an arrangement whereby income and the ability to pay would be taken into account. The limits of the various bands of relief or remission and the number of such bands have been revised from time to time with encouragement from my Office.

Parliamentary link

It will be seen that the parliamentary link is essential to the efficacy of the PCA. Never in the 174 years since the first Ombudsman was appointed in Sweden has there been any intention of giving a Parliamentary Ombudsman anywhere in the world the power to implement his own decisions by a final and directly enforceable order. In this respect I am unlike a judge, who *can* make an order or pass a sentence which is enforceable but against which there are two levels of further appeal. The PCA, like a judge, makes a finding of injustice or not as the case may be, but since his decision cannot be appealed he cannot make an enforceable order but only a recommendation for redress where injustice has been found. The power to enforce a remedy for injustice lies with Parliament.

Perhaps the best example of the Civil Service accepting and responding to criticism from this Office occurred in 1978. In March of that year my predecessor published a report to Parliament entitled *A war pensions injustice remedied*[4]. The case concerned a retired army officer who complained that the DHSS had refused to

[1]*Report from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration,* HCP 379, Session 1972–73, HMSO, 1972.
[2]*Observations by the Government on the Second Report from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration,* Cmnd 5227, HMSO, 1973.
[3]*Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. Departmental Reservations,* HCP 405, Session 1979–80. HMSO, 1980.
[4]HCP 312, Session 1977–78, HMSO, 1978.

pay interest on arrears of war disablement pension. The investigation necessarily considered the circumstances in which the arrears had become due. In most cases a war disablement pension consists of an appropriate amount for the assessed degree of disability plus an addition reflecting rank. However, where the pensioner was formerly a regular soldier and therefore receives service retired pay (which contains a rank element) the war pensions rules dictate that the rank element be withheld. Until 1964 it was even withheld in cases where an ex-regular officer was not getting retired pay but had only received a service gratuity. In that year, however, the Department were given legal advice that the practice of withholding the rank element in these latter cases had been incorrect. The complainant was one of these officers who had been treated in this wrong way. He queried the withholding of the rank element as early as 1952 but he was informed that the arrangements simply reflected the law on this matter. He raised the issue again in 1975 and this time the Department, mindful of its 1964 legal advice, accepted that the rank element should not have been withheld and authorised payment of arrears back to 1964. The Department argued that this was the correct date because it was the 1964 consolidation of the relevant Royal Warrant provisions that had made the payment of the rank element possible in his and similar cases.

At the start of the investigation the Department accepted that they had been wrong to withhold the rank addition for the period prior to 1964 and that references to the 1964 consolidation had been mistaken. They therefore undertook to pay arrears and compensation to the complainant and to try to identify similarly-placed pensioners. In fact 24 such people were identified.

Despite this apparently satisfactory outcome it was decided to investigate further and it was discovered that in 1964 the Department had been advised that the withholding of the rank element was *not* in accordance with the Royal Warrant provisions even before the consolidation. The internal debate resulted in a policy which amounted only to making a correction in cases which came unsought to the Department's attention. And unless a pensioner pressed for fuller retrospection, arrears should be paid from no earlier than 1964. The explanation given to pensioners making enquiries was:

> 'The provisions of the various Warrants/Orders under which awards of war pension for service in the 1939 War are made have recently been consolidated in one Instrument and in the course of this action it has been found possible to apply the more favourable terms of Article 11 to your award. The award

will therefore be increased to the amount shown below as from 1 October 1964.'

My predecessor concluded that, having been told in 1964 that their practice until then had been wrong, the Department deliberately chose, nevertheless, not to correct it for existing pensioners except when they had to, and then corrected it only to a limited extent. The Department went on to disguise what they were doing by a disingenuous choice of words which they revised even more disingenuously after a few months' reflection and then went on using for 13 years.

In 1978 the Department accepted these criticisms and took the appropriate remedial action. The Head of the Home Civil Service also established a committee of officials to consider the implications of this case for the Civil Service in general. The committee was concerned with the administrative practices to be adopted by departments once it has been determined that a section of the population have a legal entitlement under any particular scheme. Two kinds of administrative practice were considered:

(1) *de minimis* practices under which small sums of money are not paid despite a clear entitlement;
(2) practices relating to the handling of entitlements arising from a change in statutory provisions or a change in their interpretation.

The committee reached the general conclusion that the guiding principle should be 'that a legal entitlement, once validly established and, where necessary, properly claimed, must be met, whatever the administrative difficulties or costs of doing so'. The committee went on to recommend departmental reviews of administrative practices (including *de minimis* rules) with the object of ensuring that all were soundly based in law.

This is perhaps the clearest example of the Parliamentary Commissioner's investigation and recommendations, with the support of the Select Committee, producing Service-wide reappraisals of administrative practice. The Parliamentary backing was again crucial in producing the desired result. There are of course many other examples I could give but I think the point is sufficiently made.

Maladministration can take the form either of small-scale errors in administrative practice or, very rarely, of institutionalised general rules which are unsoundly based. My role is therefore to investigate allegations of maladministration, and to seek remedies where I uphold a complaint. In most cases the implications are not profound but occasionally, as illustrated above, the investigation raises

serious and wide-ranging problems. For Civil Service managers there is a clear duty to learn from the errors discovered and to take reasonable steps to prevent their recurrence. On major issues the Civil Service has a duty to review its administrative practice and to advise departments on the necessary changes. I have to record my view that the Service response at local office and departmental level to my reports is everything that I would wish.

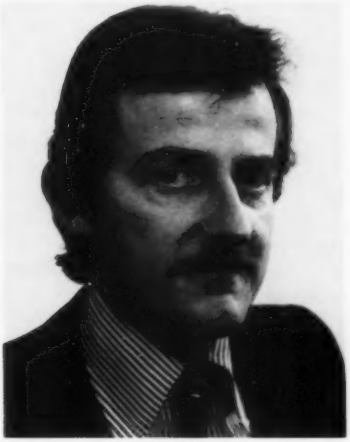
Resources and technology

Resource difficulties will not make the Civil Service managers' work any easier (and this must of course condition the concept of maladministration). But new technology and productivity gains may well offer scope for improvements in the standard of service as well as containing costs. The use of computers in, for example, income tax or benefit claims procedures, may well improve response times to enquiries by taxpayers and claimants but it should not be assumed that the consequence will be fewer complaints to me. In Department of Health and Social Security cases, in particular, the present rules and procedures permit a degree of discretion to local office staff, and although this implies a lack of certainty and may not therefore always be seen as a positive attribute of the system (especially where local office staff are under severe pressure), it certainly indicates to claimants that their problems are being seriously and individually considered. If one of the consequences of a wider use of computer technology is that the arrangements become less flexible or less responsive in consequence of narrowing the areas of discretion, there may well be a lowering of the standard of service. The results may be more certain and the error rate reduced, it is true. But to neither the citizen nor the civil servant will the result necessarily give more satisfaction.

Resource shortages may well be alleviated by technological change but communication failures are likely to persist, or even increase, with the introduction of new technology. The lesson here is, certainly, that the application of computer technology to improve the service and contain costs is desirable. But we must beware of the risk of developing an impersonal and apparently uncaring system for dealing, for example, with people's personal difficulties. Such a system would be as fertile ground for complaints about maladministration as one which left everything to the discretion of officials. It remains important for managers in the Civil Service to exercise their particular skills, informed by both their own experience and the wider conspectus disclosed by the cases I investigate.

The New HMSO Publications Centre

G Turner



Gavin Turner was a member of the team set up in July 1971 to carry out the original feasibility study. He is now Production Manager of the new Publications Centre.

The need for change

In the early 1970s, after many years of difficulties with the warehousing and distribution of government publications, HMSO set up a project team to carry out a thorough investigation of the existing procedures and to make recommendations for a complete modernisation of the systems. The study team was manned by staff from relevant disciplines within HMSO, assisted by an external management consultant.

The problem was that almost 600 staff were employed in antiquated and labour-intensive distribution procedures. Many aspects of customer service were unsatisfactory and had been the object of frequent complaint. Operating costs were high and commercial assessments were difficult to make because of lack of adequate management information. The problems were compounded by the unsuitability of the premises at Cornwall House – a cramped and old-fashioned building.

Clearly major physical and organisational changes were going to be necessary to enable HMSO to meet its objectives as government

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Management in Government 1984 (1) 9 – 16

and parliamentary publisher. The possibility of a 'greenfield' solution, integrating many disparate elements of the old system and introducing the latest methods of order-processing and warehousing offered a unique opportunity to solve many previously intractable problems.

Preliminary investigations

The project team started with an elaborate 'position audit' to provide a factual basis from which to develop a range of possible new systems and organisations. Although performance statistics of a sort had been maintained over the years, they were found to be nowhere near adequate. Our knowledge of customers' ordering patterns, for example, and their impact on the warehouse procedures was sketchy. As often happens these studies produced a number of interesting variances between line management's perception of how the system behaved and actuality. The first task was therefore to establish a much more detailed understanding of the systems.

Studies of commercial organisations

Studies were therefore undertaken of various commercial organisations with similar order-processing and warehousing problems. Although some of the basic ideas for both warehouse and computer systems were derived from the new or embryonic systems of other publishers, it was perhaps surprisingly found that HMSO's pattern of orders and inventory management had much more in common with large spare-part warehousing systems than with a conventional publishing operation. Few other publishers would maintain a backlist of 50,000 titles or retain in print many publications in little demand! As government and parliamentary publisher, HMSO has an obligation to maintain stocks of a large number of statutory and parliamentary publications which are no longer of considerable public interest, but for which a trickle of orders continues to be received. Vehicle spare-part warehouses, for example, also contain large inventories ranging from items in constant demand through to obscure parts for obsolete models, and the warehousing analogy with HMSO is close.

There are also significant differences on the order-processing side between HMSO's problems and those of most commercial publishers. Other publishers do not generally deal with thousands of mail order customers, but with a limited range of trade customers who can be equipped and trained to specify their requirements accurately. Many of HMSO's customers do not know the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) of a publication and may have only a vague idea of the title they require. HMSO's large backlist covers

a complex array of material. With statutory publications in particular, an apparently simple request may lead to advice about other related publications which the customer may also need, and this requires complex title-searching facilities on the computer.

Planning the new building

A report was then produced which recommended the building of a new publications distribution centre. The costs, management structure, staffing levels, computer systems, warehouse technology, and a new marketing strategy were put before the senior management of the Department. Treasury authority to proceed with the investment was received but it was a further two years before final ministerial approval was achieved for the siting of the building in Inner London, near to Parliament and the HMSO Parliamentary Presses. It was not until January 1978 that the various planning consents were obtained and the purchase could proceed.

The work-flow and the physical relationships between different elements of the building are crucial at the Publications Centre, and the user specification (or architect's brief) for the building was only a starting point from which the Property Services Agency (PSA) had to develop a very detailed understanding of the working environment required. The peculiarities of the site, the demands of the systems, and the technical architectural problems were the subject of a lengthy dialogue between HMSO and the PSA architect, from which finally emerged the stylish building which now stands in Nine Elms Lane, in Vauxhall.

Developing the computer systems

Meanwhile, the computer systems were also under development. Although the feasibility study had laid down broad guidelines for the area of work to be computerised and the type of systems to be used, many questions were unresolved. Computer consultants were selected to guide and support an in-house development team. Two linked mini computers were proposed to handle all the systems then envisaged, and Hewlett-Packard were selected by competitive tender to provide the hardware–which was required at an early stage for the first phase of systems development work. As this progressed, it became increasingly evident that the main systems (order-processing, stock control, customer accounting, standing orders and subscriptions) and their interfaces were considerably more complex than had been envisaged, and a third more powerful Hewlett-Packard processor was obtained.

After two further years of intensive systems development work in

close collaboration with the existing users, independent consultants were commissioned in August 1981 to assess progress on systems development. Their report suggested that the attempt to produce from scratch in one go an interlinked suite of systems covering every aspect of HMSO's publications warehousing and mail order business was too ambitious, and that many of the individual systems under design were themselves too complex. As a result of this report, HMSO management decided to carry out a drastic pruning of the user requirements in order to simplify individual systems. They opted for a phased approach to implementation, starting with only basic systems essential to the commissioning of the new warehouse which was then nearing completion, in order to realise the substantial staff saving which would be achieved when the warehouse operations moved.

The phased implementation

The first phase of the new systems was the introduction of order-processing on the Nine Elms computer at the beginning of March 1983–the despatch documentation being returned to Cornwall House for matching up with the books which still remained in the old warehouse. Over the long Easter weekend all the parliamentary publications and Statutory Instruments were moved to Nine Elms. During the summer and autumn the non-parliamentary publications and international agency titles were transferred, and the main computerised system for looking-out publications for distribution came into full operation. In the late Autumn and Winter computerised systems for customer accounting and subscriptions were commissioned. These offer more detailed customer and management information, tighter credit control, automatic hastening of invoices, automatic subscription renewals, and a variety of other facilities not previously available, and all with substantially reduced clerical staff resources. These systems will be fully operational, with the old systems completely phased out, by the end of the current financial year. With the first main suite of systems installed and running effectively, a phase of system enhancement will enable some of the desirable but less urgently required features of the original concept to be restored.

How the order processing works

The computer systems for researching both customer names and addresses and publication titles operate most effectively where the customer quotes a unique identifier in the form of a reference number–specifically a customer account code or an ISBN. Official customers and the bookselling trade, for example, can usually be relied

An order handler using a VDU to interrogate the computer's title file while talking to a telephone order customer.

upon to provide these references. However, a text searching facility using keywords from either the customer's name and address or from the publication titles can also be used. As already indicated, HMSO's backlist is large and complex, and the old manual editing of customer's orders relied upon a comprehensive knowledge of government publications backed-up with an elaborate card index system; the new computerised title search routine makes many obscure or inadequately specified publications easier to identify. Moreover, no typing effort is required in producing invoices which are automatically and accurately printed out by the computer. It also provides answer codes or messages where titles are out of print or not immediately available—orders for the latter being held on file and serviced automatically when the publication comes on stock.

The order processing itself is a batch system carried out on a computer night shift. Thus, the bulk of the orders received in one day's post are input during the course of that day and processed overnight. The warehouse documentation is ready the following morning, and the books can be looked out and despatched by the evening of the second day. This 48-hour turn-round for the majority of the orders is a vast improvement on anything that would have been possible previously.

The warehouse systems

Like the office systems, the warehouse procedures at Nine Elms are very different from those at Cornwall House. Palletised bulk stocks

are moved by fork truck from the receipt area to the bulk store where they are handled by massive stacker cranes moving in narrow aisles between the 40 foot racking stacks. Any one of over 4,000 pallets, each carrying a ton load, can be accessed within a couple of minutes to provide replenishment stock for other areas of the warehouse, or to meet large bulk orders.

In the new warehouse as in the old there is a clear distinction between parliamentary and non-parliamentary publications. This reflects not merely the tighter printing, publishing and distribution schedules required by Parliament, but also the differing physical characteristics and issuing patterns of these two broad categories of HMSO titles. The exigencies of parliamentary publishing require the material to be easily accessible even in the event of computer failure or the breakdown of mechanised warehouse systems. These publications have large initial issues, which soon drop off, after which stocks are weeded to small quantities which may then be held for many years. These vestigial stocks are now stored in specially designed four-drawer filing cabinets, with the newer faster moving items on open shelves, all laid out by parliamentary series or SI number; the whole stock is contained in a relatively compact walk-about area.

A view down one of the eight aisles in the forty-foot high Bulk Store, showing a Demag pallet handling crane.

Compared with these, non-parliamentary publications are bulkier, much more varied in format and issues decline more slowly, with a few continuing to sell regularly over 20 years or more. They are now housed in a single-storey 40 foot high warehouse adjacent to the bulk store. This general store has order-picking cranes in each of twelve aisles, capable of moving their operators with speed and accuracy across a vast face of racking. There are some 36,000 separate locations in this area, each with a unique reference number. Storage is completely random, and there is a check digit mechanism to ensure that stock quantities are accurately logged into the system, using terminals in the nearby stock management office. The system monitors stocks and triggers appropriate replenishment action. It also provides regular reports to the publishing offices in Norwich when re-order levels are reached.

The two crucial elements in the computerised picking system for the general store are the bulking of total requirements for each title and the creation of a logical picking path. As each crane operator works through his racking system, he is presented with a logical sequence of computer-printed picking documents. These picking tickets indicate where to stop and what quantities to pick. He then carries out a crude primary sort of books and picking tickets into half a dozen plastic bins beside him in the crane. When the picking run is complete these bins are automatically routed by a high-level conveyor system to a range of sorting stations adjacent to the packing area. Bulked quantities for single-line orders which do not require sorting are taken straight to the packing area. At each of the sorting stations where the books for multi-line orders are delivered, a warehouseman uses the original picking ticket to sort the books into an array of ninety pigeon-holes. The computer sorts all orders by weight. They are grouped as large orders for bulk packing into cardboard boxes, medium orders for hand-wrapped parcels, and small orders for mechanised packing into plastic bags. The packing area is also served by a conveyor system which draws off parcels to a despatch room immediately behind the loading bay.

Future developments

The use of modern computer systems in both the order processing and warehousing at the Publications Centre has enabled HMSO to make significant staff reductions—from nearly 600 in the early 70s to under 250 at Nine Elms. Various possibilities for future development are in mind. In addition to remote terminals at the publishing office, direct links will probably be made with HMSO bookshops and poss-

ibly later with major agents and other important customers. We can contemplate the long-term possibility of on-line enquiry and ordering facilities for other customers using Prestel 'Gateway' and tele-ordering facilities. Early enhancements will include more sophisticated stock monitoring systems.

A comprehensive modern publishing service

With the advent of the Publications Centre a quality service to HMSO customers is now possible which few other publishers could match. But the Publications Centre is only one aspect of the new printing and publishing services now on offer from HMSO. Others include major investment in the latest computer-controlled printing technology; the new Hansard Press is already operational; others will follow. HMSO is also launching into a range of new electronic media publishing techniques. Not only will ordinary customers benefit from these initiatives, but also author departments who in the past have had good cause for complaint. HMSO will itself benefit as a Trading Fund from the excellent return on its capital investment in the new Centre. In other words, this is a good thing in both operational and financial terms for all parties concerned.

A video cassette describing the work of the Publications Centre is available from the General Manager, 51 Nine Elms Lane, London SW8 5DR. It is available on loan free of charge and may be purchased for £25 plus VAT.

Personnel Management Strategies in the Civil Service – an Overview

Earl of Gowrie

This is the text of an introductory address given by Lord Gowrie to the Public Services' Seminar at the Institute of Personnel Management annual conference at Harrogate on 20 October 1983. Lord Gowrie is Minister of State at the Privy Council Office; he is responsible, under the Prime Minister, for day-to-day management, of the Management and Personnel Office (now part of the Cabinet Office); and he is Minister for the Arts.

Introduction

Opening this seminar, I feel rather like one of Alan Bennett's characters in a 'Beyond the Fringe' sketch. Some of you may remember that this individual was travelling on British Rail in unfamiliar territory, when the guard cried 'All change'. He attempted to leave the platform by the way one is intended to come in. An employee of the railway hailed him. 'Hey, Jack', he said, 'Just where do you think you're going?' At least, says the Bennett character, that was the gist of what he said!

In my new ministerial post, with its responsibilities for day-to-day oversight of a wide range of personnel management policies for the Civil Service, I too find myself in rather unfamiliar territory. I hear the cries of 'All change' from all around the public services, as the demands of the 1980s force us to reassess the shape, aims, objectives, and operational requirements of our organisations. And if I

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Management in Government 1984 (1) 17–28

were to try to translate the title of this particular session into English, I think that the gist of it might come out something like, 'Hey Jack, just where do you think you're going?'

Background

Before I try to answer that question I suspect that even this audience may like to be reminded, at least briefly, of what we are and where we've been. It is certainly something that I am finding fascinating as I travel round the country making myself more familiar with the work of civil servants. For what I see is a Civil Service of quite remarkable diversity. It is a federation of central government departments of very varied size and function.

At one extreme there are giants like the Ministry of Defence, about which Richard Hastie-Smith will be saying more later this morning. With around 200,000 staff its activities range from advising on nuclear defence policy to finding better boots for servicemen, both of which can crucially affect our defence capability. It deserves a session to itself. But there are several other giants, too, like Health and Social Security with about 95,000; the Inland Revenue with nearly 75,000 and the Department of Employment Group with about 55,000. These are major businesses with offices up and down the country dealing with the public and paying out benefits, collecting revenue, and promoting training and health and safety.

At the other extreme there are much smaller specialised organisations like the Northern Ireland Office, the Department of Energy or the Department of Education and Science with staff ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand, and with demanding and complex political issues to advise upon. So our personnel management has to concern itself with the needs of these specialised policy analysts, and with those of government research and development laboratories. It has to encompass major executive operations like the running of prisons and the operation of customs and immigration controls. It has to cater for large centralised clerical and computer assisted operations like the issue of driver and vehicle licences or the collection of national savings.

Nor are the staff of these departments the people that perhaps many members of the public think of when the term 'civil servant' is used. For example, nearly four out of five of them work outside London. Less than 4 per cent work in policy divisions in Whitehall. Nearly 60 per cent are at clerical level or below. Around half of the staff are women, though women tend to predominate in the lower grades.

All these staff and all these organisations – like all of yours – have

had the common experience over the last few years of making the adjustment from an expanding economy to one fighting to survive amidst a world recession. The priority of this Government, with public support, to try to reduce inflation and keep firm control of public expenditure, has meant hard choices and unavoidable reappraisals in all these areas. Demanding manpower ceilings have provided for a five-year programme to cut over 100,000 civil service jobs—nearly 14 per cent—by April next year even at a time when unemployment levels have made increased staffing to deal with the payment of benefits and special employment measures inescapable in some areas. Compensating savings and cuts in functions have had to be found. This pressure on manpower must continue. Similarly, strict cash limits have concentrated minds on the need to prune programmes and cut out waste. We simply cannot afford only marginally effective expenditure. Tight control has been exercised over the sums available for pay settlements. Even more attention has been focussed on the need to insist on value for money in all government activities.

Of particular importance in this regard has been the programme to improve financial management in all government departments, which was set out in our recent White Paper*. The Financial Management Initiative described in it shows how 31 departments have produced detailed plans to improve their management information systems. These include arrangements to develop better control mechanisms and to focus attention on the choices that need to be made in the pursuit of policy objectives. Wherever possible means will be found to identify clearly inputs and outputs, devolve responsibility as far down the line as possible, monitor performance against objectives, and hold those concerned more accountable for the results. This is a long-term programme for change to which this Government is strongly committed.

The implications for personnel managers of all this have accordingly been profound. Personnel managers have had to deal with the shake out of staff, largely through natural wastage and earlier retirement. They have had to cope with the adjustment to considerably reduced promotion opportunities for those remaining. They have had to take on a considerable training programme, particularly in financial management techniques. They have had simultaneously to look with vigilant eyes at their own activities and costs, to establish beyond doubt that their own plans and activities stood up to the value for money test.

The central machinery for the Civil Service has also been subject to quite a shake up since the last IPM Conference. The main change

*_Financial Management in Government Departments_, Cmnd 9058, HMSO, 1983.

was that I became Minister of State at the Privy Council Office. As a result of that—and with a perversity not unknown to Whitehall—I picked up responsibility for the day-to-day management, under the Prime Minister, of the Management and Personnel Office. This had meanwhile become part of the Cabinet Office! Apart from that, the Prime Minister has appointed a new adviser in Civil Service efficiency, Sir Robin Ibbs. He has taken over Lord Rayner's role as controller of an ambitious programme of efficiency scrutinies of government work. Fortunately, one area stayed the same. Barney Hayhoe still has responsibility under the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the key areas of civil service pay policy, pensions, manpower numbers and industrial relations.

If all that sounds too complicated, there are ways of putting it more simply. Think of it as a triumvirate—or for non-classicists—three men in a boat. The boat for these purposes is the Civil Service: I have the lead interest in personnel management, general management efficiency, training, recruitment, retirement policy and other conditions of service; Robin Ibbs has the lead interest in the special efficiency programme; and Barney Hayhoe controls the money and the manpower. We are all fortunately very experienced at rowing in the same direction.

A question of balance

The resulting reappraisal of the direction of our personnel management effort, about which John Cassels, then Second Permanent Secretary of my department spoke here last year, has thrown up many of the persistent dilemmas which face managers in general, and personnel managers in particular, the world over. One of the most critical is the need to establish the right balance between the central personnel function and the line manager, and consequently between mandatory and optional personnel policies and procedures. In the civil service federation of employers, which I have described, this takes on an added dimension: that of the division of responsibility between my department and the Treasury, and the personnel divisions in the operational departments.

This is, of course, well visited territory. For example one of the Institute's favourite authors—Robert Townsend—the man who suggested that a managing director's first job is to sack the personnel department—reminded us long ago in *Up the Organisation** that many give lip service but few delegate authority in important matters. Then Anthony Jay, who is perhaps more widely known in the

*Hodder—Fawcett, 1971.

Civil Service for his collaboration in the scripting of *Yes Minister,* followed up in his book *Corporation Man*[1] by describing how in a large organisation the 'first response' to complexity tends to be to try 'to do everything at the centre, have specialist departments at the centre, refer queries and anomalies to the centre, issue instructions from the centre, hold information at the centre, keep power at the centre'.

Because we recognised the truth of this diagnosis in the Civil Service context, and its undesirable consequences, we have been looking very closely at how to set the most effective balance in the future. Six major reviews have in different ways thrown light on this balance in different subject areas, and I shall refer to these as I look at each area.

Recruitment

It is natural to turn first to recruitment, because this is the beginning of the personnel management process. Here the Civil Service has to meet a special requirement, stemming from the Northcote Trevelyan report[2] of the last century, to ensure fair and open competition for all its posts. This imposes on it obligations not faced by other employers. To ensure compliance with this objective the Management and Personnel Office has a key central role to play in setting down procedures and standards to be followed, and the Civil Service Commission conducts many of the recruitment schemes on behalf of employing departments.

This can have very positive results for all involved, through the development of specialist and expert procedures to tailor the recruitment of candidates to the Service's need in the most cost-effective way. A well known example is the Civil Service Selection Board, which has since the war pioneered assessment centre techniques for the recruitment of graduates. The Atkinson report[3], published in April this year, took a searching look at this process and firmly concluded that it remained an effective and valuable instrument for the Service as a whole.

But at the more junior levels of recruitment, for example clerical staff, we have found that there is much less of a case for detailed central involvement. This has meant that the Civil Service Commission has now withdrawn from taking responsibility for the local recruitment which accounts for some 90 per cent of initial appoint-

[1]Cape, 1971.
[2]*Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service,* HCP 1713, Session 1854, HMSO.
[3]*Selection of Fast Stream Graduate Entrants,* Management and Personnel Office, 1983.

ments to the Civil Service. Now the departments for whom the staff will work are directly responsible for this, within the policy framework and guidelines laid down by my department.

It has also led to a quizzical look at centrally imposed requirements on departments which restricted the exercise of their responsibility rather too tightly. John Cassels' report of his *Review of Personnel Work in the Civil Service*[1], published this July, drew attention to the oddities that can arise from some central rules laid down with the best intentions. For example, because departments were required to advertise all vacancies in the press, in the interests of fair and open competition, the Ministry of Agriculture had to deal with 600 applications for one labourer's job and the Inland Revenue was faced with 1,300 candidates for 29 clerical posts. Departments were forced to resort to dubious devices for reducing or sifting applications, such as rejecting ones with crossings out or those not completed in prescribed black ink. I am pleased to say that more flexible arrangements, with more discretion to the local managers who need the staff to take reasonable steps without infringing the basic principles–for example through the use of Job Centres–have since been introduced, to meet the needs of today's employment climate.

Staff appraisal

Another area looked at in the Cassels report was the Civil Service's arrangements for staff appraisal. As many of you will know, for over ten years now there has been a common appraisal form in use across the Civil Service. John Smith, the Clerical Officer paying out social security benefits to his clients in Glasgow, has been assessed annually on the same form that is used on Rita Brown, a policy adviser in Northern Ireland Office. The individuals are not then shown this form, but the judgements are meant to be conveyed to them in an appraisal interview. The reports are then used in career development work and for assisting with decisions on promotions. The Cassels report inevitably poses the question of whether this uniform system is necessarily right, and recommends that in an organisation as large and diverse as the Civil Service, there should be greater freedom for variation and experimentation.

It is not, of course, that simple. Anthony Sampson remarked in his recent book *The Changing Anatomy of Britain*[2] that a recurring political problem is 'how to maintain standards while allowing decentralisation'. That is the recurring problem for the personnel manager

[1]HMSO, 1983.
[2]Hodder and Stoughton, 1982.

too. The Cassels recommendation is a compromise. To ensure the use of what has been shown over time, and by experience elsewhere, to be the most effective format for appraisal, the Management and Personnel Office would lay down a basic minimum framework of principles which all departments' appraisal systems should meet. But, beyond that, departments would have freedom to vary the structure, content and appearance of their forms to suit their own needs, and should also have the freedom to have different formats in different parts of their organisation if this seems appropriate.

The debate is therefore on between departments, and with the unions, about how we should define this essential framework, and how we should phase the introduction of new arrangements. We think that we in the centre must insist on schemes which focus the appraisal clearly on the performance of agreed duties and targets set at the outset of the year, and which work better in this respect than the current form. But we still need to leave freedom for the way in which this is done to be tailored to the circumstances of Rita Brown's work, and the management system operating in her office. We believe it is critical that our arrangements make clear to line managers their obligation to explain fully the contents of reports to their staff. But is it right, as the Cassels report proposed on the basis of trends detected outside the Civil Service, for this to be done in all cases by showing at least part of the report to the individual? What if John Smith is known as someone who reacts badly to too much adverse criticism? What if his manager were to write blander reports knowing they are to be revealed? These are matters we are still exploring.

Career management

Another area where the balance between central policy and the needs of the line has to be got right is in relation to career management. A feature of career management in the Civil Service has been a policy of moving people sideways from job to job within their particular grade. This has had considerable advantages in broadening the knowledge and experience of staff, for the good of the organisation as a whole, so that they can be used flexibly in the future. But it has sometimes been carried through with an insensitivity to the immediate needs of the line to retain sufficient knowledgeable staff to deal with current workloads. Occasionally, the merry-go-round of moving staff from one area to another for 'career development' reasons seems to have developed its own momentum.

The Cassels report, and the Fraser report, *Management Develop-*

*ment in the 1980s**, which was released at the same time as the Cassels report, both explored the optimum balance that we should seek to strike in the future. The Fraser report argued that as government becomes smaller and the tasks of departments more complex, there will be a growing need to develop more specialised skills and expertise. That report recognises the need for versatility to be retained but spells out the need for a more systematic approach to career management, especially for those with potential to reach the top positions. So in future the aim will be a more considered sequence of development postings, more tailored to organisational and line needs. Hopefully there will be less frequent movement between jobs. The Ministry of Defence has gone a long way down the road of developing systems for greater specialisation, and no doubt Richard Hastie-Smith will tell you more about that later.

Unified grading

I want at this stage to mention another important management reform we are pursuing, which has to do with the grading structure. The Civil Service grading structure, and the pay arrangements which go with it are characterised by a multiplicity of grading hierarchies. This reflects the extremely wide range of skills and disciplines which the Civil Service employs. At the same time, these separate grading hierarchies do make for difficulties in internal relationships between different groups of staff, for example, administrators, scientists and engineers. In particular, they can inhibit the selection of staff for jobs outside their previous area of work. Especially at the more senior levels, managers need to bring broader perspectives to bear on their work, and the application of particular technical or professional knowledge becomes less relevant to the jobs they have to do.

So we are embarked upon a major simplification of the grading structure at the senior managerial levels which will replace the system of occupational grades by, as we call them, unified grades. At present we have unified grades at the top three grading levels in the Civil Service, which we call the 'Open Structure'. We now intend to extend this Open Structure to the next three levels. As a result something like 100 existing grades, covering some 6,000 senior managerial staff, will be replaced by three grading bands. I have made this reform one of my major priorities for my first year. [It was subsequently announced, on 23 November, that unified grading was to be extended downwards to the Senior Principal level.]

In parallel, the Cassels report brings out quite clearly that there are limits to the capacity of departments' personnel divisions to take on

*Management and Personnel Office, 1983.

detailed planning of staff development, and that inevitably resources will have to be focussed on the most able performers. The report therefore commends the principle that more generally staff should be encouraged to exert greater influence over their own development. Personnel divisions might then become less interventionist. Their aim would be to offer information on the opportunities available and provide mechanisms – such as the advertising of more posts – to encourage staff to take their own initiative in developing their careers.

Dealing with inefficiency

The other side of the coin from career management is, of course, dealing with staff who become ineffective. The thrust of the Cassels report is to adjust the balance so that the needs and responsibilities of the line manager are more fully recognised, particularly by line managers themselves.

The Civil Service, contrary to the view of the popular press, does dismiss inefficient staff. On average each year about 300–400 staff do not have their appointments confirmed, and about a further 100, who become inefficient later in their careers, are also dismissed. However, given the size of the Service this is still a small proportion. The Cassels report identified two main reasons for this. First, a reluctance on the part of line managers to identify, monitor and report on inefficient staff. Secondly, where they did report, a tendency for personnel managers to follow with excessive caution and hesitation departmental procedures designed to be fair to the individual and to comply with the requirements of the law. Although the basic requirement in the centrally laid down framework was a trial period of six months before the conclusion of inefficiency action, some departments were taking upwards of two years from start to finish.

This is not fair on the department, the individual or his or her colleagues, and the Cassels report points the way to an improvement in two ways. First, it makes clear that we must regularly review the formal procedures to ensure that they provide for observance of the law and for fairness, but do not become excessively elaborate or time-consuming. We hope, for example, to reduce the trial period from six to three months. Second, we must establish quite clearly what is expected of personnel and line management staff and who is responsible for action at each stage. In particular, we must avoid the impression that the intervention of the personnel expert – essential to ensure equity and consistency – overrides the responsibility of the line manager, which it clearly cannot.

Equal opportunities

May I turn now to the one area in our reappraisal of personnel work which has suggested the need for more guidance from the centre, rather than less. This is the field of equal opportunities. Our work on this has been done by two joint review groups composed of management and union representatives. They have been looking at the personnel management of women in the Civil Service and that of staff from ethnic minorities.

Once again, the report from the Joint Review Group on Women has been published, under the title *Equal Opportunities for Women in the Civil Service** so that all those interested can see the analysis. The Civil Service has always counted itself a progressive employer in this respect, but the report endorses a growing feeling in many quarters that a fresh impetus needs to be given. For instance, it points out that women are very under represented in the higher grades of the Service and in 1982 only 5 per cent of Under Secretaries – the third tier from the top of the hierarchy – were women.

The need for a positive lead has therefore been established and we are now preparing a five-part programme of action for MPO and departments based on the report. The programme will include, amongst other things, a policy statement which will be widely circulated among civil servants; the designation of Equal Opportunity Officers in departments; and the use of joint management/union machinery to review progress.

Two important areas for progress will be more flexibility in work patterns, for example in the introduction of more part-time work and job-sharing; and taking sufficient care over career management and training of women. There are many existing examples of part-time work, and the Department of Health and Social Security is going to the staff in the near future with a job-sharing scheme.

Another notable example of recent progress led from the centre is the week-long course for Women in Middle Management, introduced two years ago at the Civil Service College. As an example of positive action, this women-only course aims to provide them with the necessary skills to be an effective manager. But it also covers many other issues about the role of women managers in the Service, including how to combine a career with domestic responsibilities. The course has so far received a very favourable response from its members. It has also been the subject of a rigorous evaluation study.

A similar review of the personnel management of ethnic minorities should be available this autumn. Its aim is, so far as possible, to

*HMSO, 1982.

remove the potential for racial discrimination in future in the four key areas of recruitment, promotion, allocation to duties and selection for training. For instance, it is clearly of crucial importance that ethnic minority staff are not assigned to particularly narrow or restricted areas of work. As well as reviewing procedures, we are taking steps to see if we can find a basis for monitoring the Civil Service's performance as an employer of ethnic minority staff. To this end, surveys are being planned on the ethnic origins of civil servants in the North West Economic Planning Region and in the County of Avon.

Personnel professionalism

One thread that has been running right through this survey of changing balances in personnel management policy has been the need for the central departments, or a central personnel unit in a department, to show they have knowledge and expertise. This is critical if they are to lead the way towards a particular change in emphasis.

One way in which we can do this is to show that we have fully taken account of the procedures and pioneering work done by those outside the Civil Service in both the public and private sectors. We have been particularly grateful to the IPM for considerable help in enabling us to do that, and perhaps I can put on record my gratitude for this and for the help of the many other organisations we have consulted in the course of all these reviews.

Another significant tangible proof of expertise comes with the acquisition by Civil Servants of specific qualifications in personnel management. You may be particularly interested therefore in the final study I want to mention here this morning. This has looked at the use the Civil Service ought to make, in the training of its administrators, of professional qualifications. The report has now been published as a discussion document*.

The approach to qualifications which it recommends is a selective one, integrated into career development policy. But it does include the recommendation that some–not necessarily all–personnel staff in most departments should be professionally qualified in personnel management. On this it is fully in line with similar proposals in the Cassels report. At the lower level of skills training, we have already moved quickly in this direction by redesigning the programme of basic training in personnel management skills at the Civil Service

**Qualifications. The Role of Qualifications in the Post-Recruitment Development of Civil Servants for Administrative Work.* Management and Personnel Office, 1983.

College. I am very glad to be able to tell you that this Institute has already recognised our basic programme, plus one module, as qualifying for the Foundation Certificate in Personnel Practice.

Conclusion

So much, then, for a brisk tour of where we think we are going in various personnel areas. I have taken as given that, as the Cassels report put it, the main purpose of personnel work is to mobilise the experience, talents and abilities of staff in an organisation to secure the efficient and effective execution of its policy and operational goals. I have tried to show how in the present context this must include a reflection of the need to achieve full value for money in all areas. In particular it must be in line with the thrust of the Government's overall Financial Management Initiative, which aims to give individual civil service managers substantial and well-defined objectives and responsibilities, and then delegate to them the resources and authority so that they can be held accountable for meeting those objectives.

I have therefore suggested that the overall need is for us to provide wherever possible for increased delegation from the central departments to operational departments, and from personnel divisions to line managers. I have indicated that there are limits to this process, and areas where there will still be the need for purposeful leadership. But overall I see our personnel staff becoming more expert and well informed, with less responsibility for taking individual decisions, and more for developing overall policies and procedures, and informing, advising and monitoring line management. I believe we are fortunate in the Civil Service in the quality of our workforce and in the competence and commitment of our personnel staff. We need to build on these strengths.

I know that I have outlined an ambitious programme, and I do not at this stage know if we will be able to overcome the familiar obstacles that we shall encounter. But I can say, with all the confidence of one whose two ministerial appointments have solved at a stroke the long debate about whether personnel management is a science or an art, that we shall have a damn good try.

New Approaches to Personnel Management in the Ministry of Defence

R M Hastie-Smith, CB

This is an edited text of an address given by Richard Hastie-Smith at the Institute of Personnel Management annual conference at Harrogate on 20 October 1983. He is a Deputy Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Defence and Principal Establishment Officer of that department.

Introduction

I am due to speak to you today about 'New Approaches to Personnel Management in the Ministry of Defence'. I hope that you will forgive me if I interpret this title in a broad way.

As Principal Personnel Officer for Ministry of Defence civilians, I am responsible for well over 200,000 people, a figure more comparable to an entire industry rather than to an individual commercial concern. Even within the Civil Service the Ministry of Defence is a giant since it employs no less than one-third of the entire Service. This then is my first major point – the sheer size of the civilian personnel management task in the Ministry of Defence.

My next point concerns its variety. Nearly half our civilian employees are blue collar workers of every possible description – fitters of all sorts, electricians, blacksmiths, welders and armourers among the skilled trades, and stewards, mess hands, drivers, cleaners and

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Management in Government 1984 (1) 29–42

storemen among the non-craft grades. They are represented by the national trade unions which will be well known to you. They are recruited locally and regard themselves as working for the particular establishment where they are located.

The remainder of our 200,000 employees are by no means all Civil Servants in the popularly understood meaning of that phrase. For example about 35,000 of them are engineers of many different disciplines, naval architects, physicists, meteorologists, chemists and so on. In addition we employ about 33,000 other specialist grades such as police, security men, teachers, communication staff, data processors and so on. The traditional Civil Service clerical and secretarial functions and the higher administrative and executive grades represent quite a small proportion of the whole.

Even more important to bear in mind is the fact that the number of civil servants employed in the Ministry of Defence headquarters represents only something like 14,000 out of 200,000. The biggest single slice, amounting to some 48,000, are in the General Repair and Maintenance Organisation supporting the three Services. In addition to the 31,000 in the dockyards, another very big slice is employed in our research and development establishments developing future military equipment. There are something like 20,000 in the Royal Ordnance Factories manufacturing ammunition and equipment primarily for the British Army. There are nearly 20,000 supporting the military training organisation.

There is no easy way within the Ministry of Defence of defining what job is necessarily done by a uniformed serviceman and what may be done by a civilian employee. This is a very important point on which I want to lay great emphasis. It is certainly true that 'teeth-arm' units are likely to be composed of uniformed servicemen. You will not for example find civilians actually serving in an infantry battalion or flying combat aircraft on operations. But that is about the only generalisation you can safely make. During the Falklands operations last year there were over 2,000 MOD civilians serving in the South Atlantic and Ascension Island. Two MOD civilian employees were rescued from the sea when the *Atlantic Conveyor* was sunk as a result of the bombing by Argentine aircraft, while others were killed at Bluff Cove. The tankers and supply ships supporting the South Atlantic task force were almost exclusively civilian manned, and the labour force in the dockyards and depots in this country without whose tireless efforts the task force would never even have been launched, were also virtually entirely civilian.

This almost total mingling of Service and civilian manpower makes it more sensible within the MOD to regard manpower as a

total resource, rather than trying to divide it between Service and civilian. However, divide it we must because the civilian component, large though it is, is not entirely managed from within the Ministry of Defence and it is subject to quite different rules on conditions of service and pay and different political pressures. This can be a source of difficulty and embarrassment, especially when one may get a serviceman and a civilian working literally side by side on the same task. It can also produce some curious situations when we are simultaneously doing our best to improve recruiting for the regular forces and reduce civilian manpower, even though the individuals in both cases will be employed on precisely the same task, and the civilian is the cheaper of the two.

Before I tell you how we organise and manage this vast mass of civilian employees, I must remind you that we are talking about not a separate entity but a large part of the Home Civil Service. We are therefore subject to control by the two central departments – the Treasury and the Cabinet Office (Management and Personnel Office), in such matters as pay, pensions and conditions of service. Above the clerical level, recruitment is usually managed centrally by the Civil Service Commission, and senior appointments at and above the Under Secretary level require central approval. As you can imagine, with such a large part of the Civil Service in the Ministry of Defence, we make sure that our views are heard and fully taken into account in the exercise of this central control.

Organisation of personnel management in the Ministry of Defence

My official title is Deputy Under-Secretary (Civilian Management). In civil service jargon I am called the Principal Establishment Officer. Every government department has one of these although they differ in rank according to the size of the department. 'Establishments' is an old fashioned Civil Service term meaning much the same as personnel management. But it is orientated towards posts rather than people and this is a significant difference. The publication of the Fulton report* and the establishment of the Civil Service Department in the late 1960s seemed to suggest that a change of culture had taken place in the Civil Service. But the Civil Service Department has now disappeared and we seem to be moving back to a situation in which personnel management in government departments is primarily regarded more as a means towards the end of achieving the department's policy and executive aims.

My main functions are brigaded under six subordinates. One of

* *The Civil Service:* volume 1, Cmnd 3638; volumes 2–5, HMSO, 1968.

these is the Head of the Defence Administrative Computer Division. He is responsible for co-ordinating the procurement and management of the Department's considerable number of main frame computers and for providing expert technical advice on automatic data processing when required.

Another subordinate is concerned with the management of civilian training (about which I shall be saying more later), security, and the provision of common services including accommodation, office machinery, communications, reprographic services and so on.

You might think that the two areas which I have mentioned so far have got little to do with personnel management. But one of the biggest problems we face over the next few years relates to the impact of developments in information technology on the way we do our business. Like very many big organisations we are not yet sure how to cope with these developments in organisational terms. About the only thing that we can be certain is that within the next five to ten years these developments are likely to transform the way we do business, with very big implications for the numbers and kinds of staff we need to employ. If I may cite just one obvious example, we can expect a great increase in the number of visual display units on people's desks and a vast reduction in the number of bits of paper in circulation. This has obvious effects on our future needs for messengers and clerks.

The third main area of my activity comes under an Under Secretary with the title Director General of Management Audit. He is responsible to me for the control and audit of civilian personnel as a resource. He has similar responsibilities to my colleague, the Principal Finance Officer, in relation to money as a resource. He has been particularly concerned with the development in the MOD of MINIS – the Management Information System for Ministers to which Mr Heseltine attaches great importance. Although he is not a personnel manager as such, it is of vital importance to the way we run our organisation that he has a very close relationship with the personnel managers, because it is he and his staff who define the tasks to be done in terms of numbers and grades of staff. It is then the function of the personnel managers to provide and manage these people.

My actual personnel management functions are divided between three Under Secretaries. One of these has general responsibilities for policy on pay, general conditions of service including discipline, superannuation policy, industrial relations and specific personnel management responsibilities for our industrial staff and a particular group of specialist staff. This particular group of specialist staff are

a very mixed bunch which include policemen (a force larger than many Home Office forces), firemen, the forces broadcasting service, librarians, chaplains, historians, legal advisers, medical grades, museum grades and professors of music, house matrons and so on. The main thing they all have in common is that in each case they are doing something for which there is a fairly precise single external analogue outside the Civil Service. This is an important consideration when it comes to matters of pay and grading, and it is the reason why we have grouped them in this way.

My second personnel management Under Secretary and my fifth main area of responsibility concerns the personnel management of the Science Group and the Professional and Technology Group in the Ministry of Defence, consisting of almost 30,000 people. It is they who run the Research and Development Establishments, the Royal Ordnance Factories and the dockyards, and are very largely responsible for defence procurement. Collectively they are responsible for spending between seven and eight billion pounds a year of the taxpayers' money on defence equipment, and in their qualifications, skills and experience they represent an absolutely priceless human resource. They consist of a spectrum of people from industrial supervisors at one end to Fellows of the Royal Society at the other. They are all professional specialists who know a very great deal about their particular job. I should perhaps add that this particular Under Secretary himself started his Civil Service career as a scientist.

My third personnel manager Under Secretary, and my sixth and last main area of responsibility, concerns the personnel management of the administrative, executive and clerical grades in the Ministry of Defence. This is a function for which there is a precise parallel in every other government department. Leaving top management aside for one moment, within the Ministry of Defence we have approximately 10,000 people in the grades between Executive Officer and Assistant Secretary who in very broad terms might be called middle management. Of these people, all but the most senior are divided into six specialisms and this is a feature of MOD personnel management. The largest of these, taking up almost a quarter of the total number, is supply management and administrative support. Next at about 19 per cent comes personnel management, and just behind it finance. Then comes Automatic Data Processing and behind that stores and equipment procurement. Finally our smallest specialism, amounting to about five per cent of the total, is accountancy. It is our aim to develop individual careers within one of these specialisms – although a degree of inter-posting

is necessary to produce widely experienced senior managers for the future.

So much for structure. But how does it all work on the ground? There is no simple answer to this question because our practice varies so widely. To take one extreme example, the Meteorological Office at Bracknell, employing over 2,000 people is very largely self-contained so far as personnel management is concerned. It is the only employer of a particular specialised class of scientist, and the establishment has as its Secretary a very experienced administrator, an Assistant Secretary whose equivalent military rank would be a Brigadier, who, within broad policy guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Defence, is very capable of providing all the day-to-day personnel management that is required. That is one end of the spectrum. At the other end of the scale we have a very large number of minor establishments. For these, local personnel management expertise is provided by a regional organisation we call Civilian Personnel Management authorities, of which we have over 90 covering the country.

In general it is our personnel management policy to push as much personnel administration as we possibly can onto the line manager and as far down the line management as we can possibly go. The recruitment and management of our industrial workforce, numbering you remember 100,000, is carried out almost entirely by local establishments. They deal locally with the trade unions, and within certain limitations they have freedom to hire and also fire staff. Our great mass of clerical staff are also recruited and very largely managed locally. But even with these locally recruited and managed staff, there are important differences between a government department and a company in the private sector. However much we try to delegate, there are certain centralising forces which we cannot ignore. For example any of our employees however humble, or indeed anyone who has tried but failed to get a job with us, can write and complain to his local Member of Parliament. The result will be an enquiry from the Private Office of one of our own Ministers, and perhaps extensive questioning of some local decision. Because of this, inevitably every local manager feels that head office is looking over his shoulder to a much greater extent than is normal in the private sector.

There is another and more functional reason why head office should take an interest even in the locally engaged and managed staff. In this day and age we are taking on literally hundreds of university graduates as clerks. Over half our Executive Officers will be promoted from the clerical grades. Many of them will go on to

higher things. When I joined the Civil Service in 1955 the Permanent Secretary of my department had started as a boy clerk, and so had one of the two Deputy Secretaries. I hope and believe that this is still going to be possible in the Civil Service of the future, but it can only happen if we both keep the avenues of promotion open from bottom to top, and make sure that we assess our stock of talent at every level and make the best possible use of it.

This leads me on naturally to two particular characteristics of present day personnel management in the Ministry of Defence which I should emphasise. These are career development and succession planning. The names speak for themselves. Career development derives from the idea of the Civil Service as a career service. It is designed to make the best use of human resources and get the right people into the right jobs at the right time.

Succession planning tends to be applied mainly to the more senior posts in the organisation. It is something in which the Armed Services have led the field for many years, and I believe that within Whitehall the Ministry of Defence is probably in the lead in the civilian field. It may seem simply commonsense to identify not merely the next people who are likely to go into key posts but the next ones after that as well so that we can ensure that they are gaining the right kind of experience first.

Promotion procedures

Our promotion policy is one of the better features of our personnel management. Every employee has an Annual Staff Report completed by his superior and endorsed by the next superior. Half this report is concerned with performance in the present job over the previous 12 months. This is discussed with the subject of the report. The rest of the report is concerned with fitness for promotion and long-term potential.

These reports are scrutinised by the central personnel divisions and those marked 'fitted for promotion' are invited to appear before a promotion board. These consist of three people several grades senior to the grade of the candidate. The chairman of such a board is virtually whole-time for several months to ensure consistency of standards. The candidates successful before the board get 'promotion tickets' in our jargon, which are cashed as posts in the higher grade come vacant over the next few months.

The system has faults. Some of the annual reports suffer from over-marking, and candidates who interview badly find the boards difficult. But the absence of any favouritism makes the system popular with our staff.

Reduction of civilian numbers

I have already spoken of the huge number of civilian employees in the Ministry of Defence. The largest single task on MOD personnel management is to reduce that number. This is not just a matter of political ideology. It is also a straightforward matter of defence policy and priorities. Defence equipment is rising in cost in real terms by approximately six per cent a year. The defence budget cannot possibly grow at the same kind of rate. This means that everything else within the defence programme is under pressure to make reductions in order to maximise the scale of the resources which we can devote to the procurement of new equipment. Hence if we were under no external pressure at all to reduce civilian numbers, we should ourselves within the MOD be generating this pressure for purely defence reasons.

Over the years the reduction has been dramatic. In 1964 when the unified Ministry of Defence was created, total Ministry of Defence civilian staff numbers were almost 432,000. By 1 April 1984 we shall have come down to less than half that figure at 200,000. These reductions have been achieved by a series of major policy initiatives, and by the introduction of greater efficiency.

The most recent of these policy initiatives was a White Paper published in June 1981 as Cmnd 8288*. Among a number of other far-reaching measures affecting the whole defence programme, this White Paper announced that the naval base and Royal Dockyard at Chatham would have to close in 1984. At the same time the closure of the Naval Dockyard at Gibraltar was announced together with a major reduction in the size of Portsmouth and closures of many naval stores and fuel depots. In total these measures were planned to save nearly 20,000 civilian posts. In management terms the closure of Chatham Dockyard has been a remarkable success story.

In July 1981, when the closure decision was announced, there were over 7,000 people employed. We have not merely succeeded in running the numbers down to closure without industrial action, but at the same time the refit of the last nuclear submarine to be refitted at Chatham – HMS *Churchill* – has been completed to time, and so has the refit of the frigate HMS *Hermione*. On top of this, a very large number of experienced professional and technical grades have been persuaded to move to other jobs where we needed them in Portsmouth, Devonport, Rosyth and other places.

There is no magic about how this was achieved. It was the result of leadership and very skilled management by the General Manager of the dockyard, supported by an excellent personnel department which went to great lengths to try and sort out the problems of each

* *The United Kingdom Defence Programme: the way forward;* HMSO.

individual employee to his best advantage. The dockyard management was supported by a flexible and enlightened management within the MOD Headquarters. The result was that we gained and kept the confidence of the trade unions and their members. Inevitably there have been a number of hard cases. But generally speaking our employees felt that we were doing our best and they have responded by being loyal and co-operative.

Closures on the scale of Chatham Dockyard do not happen very often. But there are many smaller examples in which the MOD personnel management have been intent on producing economies and improving efficiency. Let me mention a few examples. We have saved 4,700 posts and over £10 million a year by putting cleaning out to contract at 167 establishments. We have saved 230 staff and nearly £3 million a year by cutting back on our provision of secondary education overseas. We have saved 50 posts by a reorganisation of the Defence Statistical Services. We hope to save nearly 100 posts and a lot of money by getting the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham taken over by an outside academic body who will run it for us under contract. The search for improved efficiency and consequential savings is a never-ending process. Incidentally the popular idea that Civil Service jobs are totally secure has become a bit of a myth. The facts speak for themselves.

Hiving off the ROFs

We are confronted in the Ministry of Defence over the next year with the major task of hiving off the Royal Ordnance Factories. The Government has decided in principle to privatise this organisation. However it is achieved, it is going to be a very major task in terms of personnel management. Our personnel management problem will be to persuade those people who will be necessary to the Royal Ordnance Factories if they are to have an independent existence, that their best interest lies in staying with the factories.

This is not going to be at all easy. In fact at present the ROFs are in a very flourishing state. They made a good profit last year and some of the pay increases which have been achieved within the nationalised industries in the last year or so suggest that there can be positive advantages in getting outside the strict cash controls of the Civil Service. Despite these facts there are a very large number of people among the 19,000 employed at the 11 Royal Ordnance Factories who are worried about their future. Will an independent ROF company or companies continue to make profits? Will their jobs be secure with the new organisation? Will their promotion prospects

and conditions of service be worsened by the change? Will their pensions be secure? These are the kinds of questions which we have got to answer satisfactorily if we are to make a success of the Government's announced policy. And of course it will not be sufficient just to give the right kind of generalised assurances to the trade unions and our employees. At the same time as we do this, we are going to have to deal with a lot of individual problems arising from the transfer. It is going to be a very challenging task for our personnel managers on an even larger scale than the closure of Chatham Dockyard. There are only three things about it which I can say with positive certainty at this stage. We are only going to have a limited amount of time to do the job, it is going to be a great deal of hard work, and we have got to succeed.

Training

Perhaps because Ministry of Defence civil servants spend their working lives alongside the Armed Services who devote a great deal of effort to training in peacetime, we also by civil service standards devote much attention to this subject.

The three main categories of training available are functional, management and developmental, and professional. Functional training is, of course, related to specific jobs or tasks. Management and developmental training needs, on the other hand, are derived from the career patterns of our generalist and specialist staff. For example, we have large numbers of specialists with engineering or scientific qualifications who come into the service to practise their particular skills. Their main training requirement arises in middle life when we seek to convert them into general managers. This is not always easy. A young man or woman who has started out as a research scientist or a naval architect, for example, often wishes to go on in that line of business. Not only do new skills have to be learned, but there has to be a basic change in motivation to turn an individual into a successful Director of an Establishment or General Manager of a dockyard. However, we also see advantage in encouraging our generalists to become professionally qualified. Although many of these hold university degrees, nowadays they do not come into the Civil Service in the way that they go into Local Authorities with specific vocational qualifications as lawyers or sanitary engineers or what you will.

We therefore send a lot of civilian staff to the Royal Army Pay Corps school at Worthy Down to study for the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants qualification. We have started putting young people out to acquire Chartered Accountants qualifications

with outside firms. We have got people studying with our assistance for a whole range of other qualifications including, I am happy to say, those awarded by our hosts today.

Statistics show that we are already a great deal better qualified than the bulk of the management of British industry, and particularly in the financial field our present training policies are extremely purposeful.

The Government's White Paper on *Financial Management in Government Departments*[1] states that there are three major target groups for fuller training in financial management. These are staff in senior management posts which require an understanding of financial principles and practice, staff working in finance divisions and staff with significant responsibility for managing resources. All government departments are responding to this challenge in their different ways. Within the Ministry of Defence we have set up quite separately from our main training organisation a financial training school to handle this very specialised activity. For the Civil Service as a whole the Civil Service College will be playing a co-ordinating and leading part. But among individual departments I shall be surprised if there are any who react more vigorously than the Ministry of Defence.

Pay and grading

Questions of pay and grading concern the Civil Service as a whole rather than the Ministry of Defence on its own, and, as I mentioned at the outset, they are controlled by the Treasury and the Cabinet Office (MPO) on behalf of the whole Civil Service.

On grading we are seeking to change the situation which exists at present whereby there are the best part of 1,000 grades within the Civil Service. We have made a start at bringing order out of chaos at the top of the Service by bringing the top three grades into line with each other in the so-called Open Structure. We have recently sought to take this process of unified grading further down the Civil Service rank structure. Of course changing the grading structure in this way does not make people any more interchangeable than they are now. Their personnel management has to take into account their specialised skills and experience. But it will remove the kind of irritant we have got at present whereby a project manager doing precisely the same job may receive a markedly different salary depending on whether he is an engineer or a scientist by origin.

Turning to the subject of pay, the scene is dominated by the report of the *Inquiry into Civil Service Pay*[2] led by Sir John Megaw, which

[1]Cmnd 9058, HMSO, 1983.
[2]Cmnd 5590, HMSO, 1982.

was published in July 1982. The Government and the Council of Civil Service Unions both remain committed to the aim of working out in the light of the Megaw Report a new ordered pay system which will provide, for the longer term, fair and sensible arrangements for determining pay for non-industrial civil servants.

We have a number of detailed problems within the Ministry of Defence such as the interface between our blue collar workers, the industrials, and their non-industrial supervisors. Because of various kinds of productivity payment there are occasions where a supervisor is being paid less than the people under his supervision. Obviously such a situation creates grievances. More seriously, the size of the Ministry of Defence and the variety of the people who work for it means that we simultaneously have a number of different public sector pay policies functioning at the same time. As a result the pay treatment which the Armed Forces receive is different to that which is accorded to the Civil Service, which is different again to that accorded to our police or our firemen. It is not easy to explain the rationale underlying these apparent anomalies to our employees.

Industrial relations

I would like to tell you something about how industrial relations are managed in the Ministry of Defence. However I should first say that this once again is a matter in which the Ministry of Defence follows a pattern which applies to Civil Service as a whole.

For our blue collar workers of whom you will remember we have 100,000, we deal with the national trade unions which cover every employer. Within government the Ministry of Defence is far and away the largest employer of blue collar labour. As a result it plays a major part on the official side of the committee, chaired by the Treasury, which negotiates basic pay and the main conditions of service. In addition it runs two Trade Joint Councils, which settle grading, environment and other pay-related issues peculiar to government industrial establishments, while productivity schemes are negotiated locally in the light of a set of general principles. Most of our dealings with these trade unions are at the local level.

Our non-industrial grades belong to their own civil service trade unions. Different types of civil servant have their own associations. It is characteristic of these non-industrial trade unions that they like to deal with matters centrally, rather than locally and that they do not like sitting round the same table with the representatives of the industrial trade unions. This means that very often we have to duplicate the process of consultation with our staff representatives.

In general, the Ministry of Defence, like the rest of the Civil Service,

maintains a benevolent attitude towards the trade unions. We believe that they exist to project and promote the interests of their members by seeking to regulate their conditions of service. Because they exist, they enable the point of view of the individual civil servant to be put effectively before the authorities on all questions affecting their employment. Civil servants are encouraged to belong to trade unions of their choice because the existence of fully representative unions not only in our view promotes good staff relations, but is essential to effective negotiations on conditions of service.

Our relationship with our industrial and non-industrial Trade Unions is governed by what we call the Whitley machinery. Whitley was the name of the Speaker of the House of Commons at the end of the First World War, and the system of industrial relations to which he gave his name derives from the experience in the British defence industries during the war when it was found to be essential to have good industrial relations machinery to avoid strikes and industrial action which would disrupt essential production.

In essence the Whitley machinery consists of a system of committees. In each case the employing department which is described as the Official Side, provides the Chairman and one side of the committee: the trade union side provide the Vice-Chairman and the Staff Side of the committee. The precise number of seats on the Staff Side which are allocated to each trade union depends on the proportion of their membership.

It is a peculiarity of these Whitley committees, as they are called, that they can take place at virtually any level. The apex of the pyramid is the National Whitley Council of which the Chairman is the Head of the Home Civil Service and the Vice-Chairman is invariably the Secretary-General of one of the biggest non-industrial trade unions. Each department has its own Departmental Whitley of which the Permanent Under Secretary, the top civil servant, is the Official Side Chairman. But below that there is a whole hierarchical structure of Whitleys some of which deal with subjects, some of which deal with functional areas of the department and some of which deal with geographical areas. At their lowest level Whitley Committees exist within individual establishments and it is perhaps at this level that they are most valuable. In essence they are simply a structured channel of communications between the employer and the employee. By and large the system works very well although it does take up a lot of time and consume a lot of paper.

One of the consequences of the existence of this system is that the Staff Side expects to know about any new ideas which occur to the department which could conceivably affect the position of the staff.

As a result we are constantly having to inform them of new studies, new reviews and so on. In practical terms this is not really a difficulty. The vast majority of civil servants are loyal and co-operative, and these happy tendencies are increased if we keep them informed about what we are trying to do and even about what we are just starting to think about.

Let me finish on a purely human note. The Ministry of Defence may be vast, but our 200,000 staff consist of 200,000 individuals. We forget that fact at our peril. Our business as personnel managers is to get the best out of those individuals by training and motivation. Our function is to serve the purposes of line management. In the field of defence these purposes can be of the utmost importance and complexity.

Succession Planning

C V Peterson

Colin Peterson has been an Under Secretary in the Management and Personnel Office since March 1982. From 1974–82 he was on the staff at Number 10 Downing Street as the Prime Minister's Secretary for Appointments.

'Succession Planning' for an organisation means thinking ahead about how it is going to fill its senior posts best in the future, not excluding how it would fill them at short notice if an emergency arose. This means not only trying to identify the 'high flyers' but also making sure that they have, or acquire, the experience and training which will fit them for the top posts.

Any organisation of some size probably does succession planning in some form. The planning may be more or less elaborate; it may be put down on paper, or it may be stored in the mind of the Chairman or Chief Executive–with a certain risk attached, if those ideas are never shared with others. Indeed, it is not a feasible course for an organisation as large as the Civil Service to rely on the 'folk memory' of senior management. Succession planning has, to a greater or lesser extent, to be formalised.

A form of succession planning for senior posts has, therefore, been practised for a long time in the Civil Service. The process was an annual one. It was built round the annual assessment of performance and promotability made on individual officers by their supe-

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Management in Government 1984 (1) 43–47

riors. For staff in what is now called the Open Structure–that is, broadly the top spectrum of jobs in the Civil Service–and for those below seen as 'flyers', copies of these assessments were sent to the then Civil Service Department (CSD). Arising from this exchange, a senior member of the CSD went round to each department and talked to the Permanent Secretary, who would often be accompanied by his Principal Establishment Officer. They discussed the general strength of the Department's Deputy Secretary and Under Secretary 'lines', and the availability of talent to fill the vacancies expected to arise over the following five years. Development needs, for example a posting to a central department or to the private sector, would be identified, and where a lack of suitable people to fill a forthcoming vacancy was likely, the CSD was sometimes able to help in arranging a transfer from a department in 'surplus'. Special attention was given to Principal Establishment Officer and Principal Finance Officer appointments. Every two years there was, in addition, a 10-year forward look at potential vacancies and the available resources to fill them.

In 1981 there came a significant change. In that year, the CSD, in a paper submitted to the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee, outlined its ideas for putting succession planning on a more formal and structured footing. These ideas had been worked out following close consultation with private sector firms which practised succession planning. They were very much a part of the drive to improve the management skills of the Civil Service and the use of the Service's most important resource, its staff.

In the paper (published in the Third Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, Session 1981–82)* the CSD described the main objectives of the new procedures as 'to identify potential successors to important posts early enough to allow them to be given an appropriate blend of training and experience, to reduce the frequency of moves of administrative staff, to enable those whom the Civil Service refers to as "generalists" increasingly to specialise in particular areas of work; and to provide those likely to occupy the highest ranks in the Service with direct experience of management both of people and of money'.

The most significant change of procedure was that departments would produce each year a succession plan for every post in the Open Structure, and for all posts at Assistant Secretary level for which careful succession planning was required. Each succession plan, which would have attached to it a job profile, would indicate

*Volume 3, Minutes of Evidence (pp 68–69) in *Efficiency and Effectiveness in the Civil Service,* H C P 236, Session 1981–82, HMSO, 1982

officers who could succeed if the post were unexpectedly vacated at short notice; who would be suitable to succeed in the normal course of events; and who should be in the field for the next but one succession. Certain categories of plans would be sent to CSD annually, and these would be discussed by CSD with departments. The paper concluded:

> 'The Government is satisfied that benefits from these changes though unquantifiable will fully justify the extra work that is to be done. The introduction of the new system is now beginning; it will be fully operational by 1983.'

What does a succession plan actually look like? An example of an imaginary Plan, for an Under Secretary post in the Treasury, is shown on page 46.

Since 1981 the system has been steadily developed. It is now, in 1984, in full operation as foreshadowed in the 1981 paper. Departments are producing succession plans for all the posts in question. Equally important, they also produce 'career plans' for all those officers (except those aged over 55) named on the succession plans. This is vital; it serves to link together the thinking about how to deal with the vacancies as they arise, and the training and career development of the people expected to fill the posts.

Circumstances change the whole time, and succession planning must be flexible. Any organisation which felt that it was obliged to deal with vacancies rigidly by what was indicated on its succession plans would quickly run into trouble. The benefits, or the success, of the system cannot be measured simply by the proportion of senior posts which are in fact filled as predicted on the succession plans relating to those posts. The benefits of the system derive, to a very large extent, from the thought which departments are compelled to give to their strategies for filling their senior posts, and the early thought which they are compelled to give to the training and career development to the people identified as possessing the potential for the top posts.

Developing the system in the Civil Service has been extremely intensive of the time of a limited number of very senior staff in departments. (Of its nature, succession planning work is not easily delegated.) It will continue to take much time and effort each year, but this should be reduced now that job profiles exist and now that some at least of the plans are likely only to need small changes or updating each year. The flow of paperwork is nevertheless very large, and the system will need regular review with simplification in mind. Within the Service the system is a partnership between

SUCCESSION PLA

Department: TREASURY

Pla

Post No. (and grade)	Title	Holder	Next Vacant	
US/14	Director Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency	G Selfridge	April 1984	R A D G M

aff in Confidence

LANNING (EXAMPLE)

Plans

	Successors	
Emergency	Next Normal	Later
R A Debenham (US) G M Marshall (AS)	G M Marshall (US) P Q Snelgrove (DCSO)	R S Freeman (AS) T U Hardy (SPSO)

departments and the centre in the form of the Cabinet Office (Management and Personnel Office). The role of the latter, in examining the plans sent to it, is to ensure reasonable consistency of approach throughout the Service, to prepare the way for approval of succession to particular vacancies, to note officers for whom experience outside the department (or the Service) may be desirable, to keep an eye on any general need for training or particular experience posting which may be emerging and to identify at an early stage general trends, for example changes in wastage patterns, which might call for special remedies.

At the very top of the Service, appointments of Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries require the approval of the Prime Minister after consultation with the departmental Minister concerned. The succession planning system does not, of course, pre-empt such approval in any way, but helps to ensure that recommendations at this level submitted to Ministers are well prepared and represent, wherever possible, an adequate field of choice.

Fast Stream Training at the Civil Service College

J W Thompson

John Thompson has been Director of Fast Stream courses in the Civil Service College since December 1982. He is a Principal on loan from the Department of Trade and Industry.

This article is about formal training given to participants in the accelerated promotion scheme for administrators in the Civil Service – the Administration Trainee (AT) scheme – often called the 'fast stream'.

Entrants to the AT scheme consist of young officials (either fresh recruits or serving civil servants) who are considered to have the potential to reach senior posts. Selection is through the Civil Service Selection Board (CSSB) and a Final Selection Board. Most entrants to the scheme are in their 20s and are graduates.

Those entering the scheme as ATs will spend two years in the grade and this is a probationary period. If their performance during that time is satisfactory, they will be promoted to Higher Executive Officer (Development) (HEOD) at the end of it. Internal candidates may also enter the scheme directly as HEODs. The length of time spent in the HEOD grade before promotion to Principal will vary according to the pace of development of the individual and the vacancies available but the normal pattern is promotion within two

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Management in Government 1984 (1) 48–54

to four years of entering the grade. The pace and extent of an individual's progress beyond Principal will depend on performance and the vacancies available but the best of the fast stream can expect to reach some of the most senior positions in the Civil Service during their careers.

Clearly the rewards of being an AT or HEOD are great but so are the pressures. The postings given to ATs and HEODs are demanding. Reductions in staff have meant that AT and HEOD postings are now even more testing than in the past. The notion of these being supernumerary 'training grades'—if this ever existed—has almost been forgotten. Moreover ATs and HEODs are only being evaluated on their performance in the present post. Their long-term potential is also being examined. In these circumstances formal training should be able to play a positive role to the benefit of both the individual and the department.

The College's role

Pre-Fulton, the Centre for Administrative Studies provided Assistant Principals with formal training and education designed to ease the transition from university to the Civil Service of the day. After Fulton, the newly established Civil Service College took over this responsibility. At that time, in the early 1970s, the nature of the market changed because Fulton also brought the amalgamation of the separate administrative, executive and clerical classes, encouraged a greater role for specialists and introduced the notion of the 'open road to the top'. The College mounted a big programme designed to meet revised needs, mainly for specialist administrators but also for equivalent specialist grades.

During the 1970s 'Fast Stream Training' was based on two long courses of eight to fifteen weeks taken between postings. The courses comprised a mix of the disciplines fashionable at the time—economics, statistics, public administration, social/industrial policy, finance and staff management. However, by 1980 conditions in the Civil Service began to make it difficult for departments to release staff for long courses. This, together with decreased recruitment made for poor use of College resources. A change was needed.

The modular system

After consultation with departments, the College developed what has become known as the modular system. This was introduced in September 1981. It has been designed to complement and reinforce the continuous desk training that ATs and HEODs already receive

through carefully selected postings in their early years. It aims not only to give departments and individuals greater flexibility in their use of the training but also to take more account of recent management developments in the Civil Service and the changing needs of the fast stream. This means increased emphasis on improving the management skills of the fast stream, and trying to give the training at times more appropriate to the needs of particular postings.

We believe that there are three clear phases in the career of the average fast stream entrant up to and including his or her first year as a Principal. The early months as an AT are the 'induction' phase, the next two or three years a consolidation or 'foundation' phase, and the next year probably marks the beginning of real 'management' responsibilities. The modular framework is built to meet the different needs of these phases, and to relate as closely as possible to the desk training they receive as they pass through what might be markedly different types of jobs.

The induction modules

Many ATs join in the Autumn. Thus, early in the next year, after three of four months' service, they are invited to come on a series of three linked induction modules lasting in all four weeks. These may be taken as separate courses, but for those entirely new to the Civil Service we prefer them to take the four weeks together. The aim of the three modules is to provide an introduction to various skills and background which by this time the new entrant should find valuable to add to growing departmental experience. The titles of the modules, 'Communication Skills' (one week), 'Parliament, Government and the Civil Service' (two weeks), and 'Finance Control of Public Expenditure' (one week), indicate their subject areas.

'Communication Skills' is held at the College's Sunningdale centre where students live in and are expected to work in the evenings. It aims to deal with some of the difficult skills concerned with transfer of information in oral and written briefing, meetings, Parliamentary Questions and ministerial correspondence. It is a very active course with a lot of individual and group work based on real cases from a variety of departments. Throughout this course we have used one tutor to each four of five students, thus ensuring a high level of personal attention. For the College this course, being the first for many ATs, is very important in setting a standard and perhaps persuading reluctant participants that formal training away from the desk can be valuable.

'Parliament, Government and the Civil Service' and 'Finance and Control of Public Expenditure' are both held in the London centre of

the College in Belgrave Road. The aim of these modules is more towards context than skills. They provide a change to consider the role and overall constitutional setting of government and various functions within departments.

The foundation modules

In the middle or foundation phase as an AT or HEOD there are six modules available, some of which may be optional. Broadly there are three modules concerned with skills and three with context. 'Essential Quantitative Skills' (two weeks) deals with statistical techniques which are important in the analysis of many policy and administrative problems. There is, as always, a pressing need for administrators to become more numerate and this module is vital. 'Economics, Government and the Administrator' (two weeks) covers economic concepts as well as some analysis of the recent performance of the UK economy. Finally, 'Principles of Accounts' (one week) aims to improve ability in the interpretation of company financial accounts. To help any students who need some revision of their mathematics before these modules, the College runs a programme called 'Heat-Start Maths' based on diagnostic exercises, self-instructional material and one formal day at Belgrave Road. This has proved particularly valuable in helping to ensure that students begin the main modules with something like a common frame of reference on such things as algebraic manipulation, percentages and ratios.

The approach of the other three foundation modules is the government context in social, industrial and international affairs. 'The Social Role of Government' (three weeks) aims to examine social policy issues in some depth, with individual placements of students with relevant organisations for part of the course. 'Government and Industry' (three weeks) also gives students the opportunity to spend time outside the service with a variety of organisations in industry, both public and private while examining industrial performance and prospects. Finally, 'International Relations and UK Interests' (two weeks) provides a view of the UK's political and commercial position in the world and a chance to practise skills such as negotiation in an international setting. This course is held in Sunningdale; the rest are in London.

The resource management modules

During the later period as an HEOD it is important that the individual's responsibility for management of resources is brought to the fore, particularly since it is in the nature of many AT/HEOD jobs

that the only resource directly managed is the individual's own time. Thus, most departments will aim to send their HEODs on our three resource management modules. Like the induction modules, these are run as a block, although they are separate courses.

'Staff Management' (two weeks) is held at Sunningdale, is highly participative and, as with the earlier 'Communication Skills' module, has a ratio of one tutor to four or five students. It aims to give students knowledge and skills across a range of behavioural issues affecting the way people work in the Service and the procedures to which we are subject, such as appraisal and reporting. 'Information as a Resource' (one week) back in London, looks at information technology in the Civil Service. It tries to help the generalist administrator to be more aware of sophisticated approaches to the use of information as well as more able to work with the experts in this field. Finally, 'Resource Allocation and Financial Management' (two weeks) returns the students to Sunningdale to examine the techniques for making reasoned decisions about the use and control of public resources. By the end of their time as ATs or HEODs, fast stream officials will normally have received several months of formal training, in addition to the desk training so vital for their overall development.

But does it work?

All the modules I have described are planned and run against the relatively well-defined needs of a small and coherent group of civil servants. The College staff who organise and teach on the courses are all experts in their field. The quality of the lecturers brought in from the universities, and public and private sector organisations, is very high. The courses are designed to be, and usually are, interesting, challenging, participative and fun. But are the resources used on them, the costs of running the courses and the student costs, being well spent? Is the training effective?

Much of the training carried out in the Civil Service is done as an 'act of faith'. The effectiveness of background or context training is notoriously difficult to measure, as is training in interpersonal skills. On fast stream training we have practical work built into various parts of the programme to try to test our effectiveness. But this is not as comprehensive as we would like, and this type of first level validation must be extended. At the broader level we have an overwhelmingly favourable reaction from students, both to individual courses and to the programme as a whole. The grade managers of ATs and HEODs in departments also believe that in the main the modular structure and course content is meeting departmental

needs. However it would be wrong to rest on this. One of my tasks in 1984 is to examine the ways in which we can develop a wider and more objective system for evaluating not only individual courses but the programme as a whole.

Part of this issue is the extent to which, in any general training programme, the needs of the individual can really be met. ATs and HEODs are given more and (dare I say it) better quality training than any other generalist group in the Civil Service. There is flexibility in our approach which allows some modules to be missed depending on the background of the individual and the department's needs. And we do undertake remedial training in the difficult area of mathematics when necessary. However, perhaps we should devote more resources to looking closely at individual needs rather than assuming, as does most formal training in the Civil Service, that students of the same grade and roughly the same age need roughly the same training. Of course it all comes back to available resources and balancing what you have with what you need to do. Ideally it should be the other way round. Often it is not.

A further issue is the increasing difficulty departments have in releasing ATs and HEODs for formal training. Clearly the most important element in making a good civil servant better is sound advice and guidance while doing a demanding and worthwhile job. Most ATs and HEODs are doing demanding and worthwhile jobs and are often under great pressure. In these circumstances, and with staff reductions, they do not always come through the training system with the regularity which is desirable. Short-term pressures prevail. We have a high level of last-minute withdrawals from courses and it seems that often line managers find themselves responding more to immediate pressures than to the long-term training needs of their subordinates. Part of the answer is in our hands. We must try to make formal training even more closely related to the needs of the job so that line managers can see the relevance and quickly experience the benefits of the training. The difficulty here is that much of the fast stream training programme is designed to be generally helpful to ATs and HEODs across a range of tasks. Thus, line managers may legitimately feel that they are suffering absences from which others will eventually benefit. As always, it is a question of balance: here of short-term loss with long-term gains.

But the problem is perhaps wider than that. The average Civil Service manager has never been particularly strong on development of staff for the future. The culture of the Service has been against it. When did anyone last see 'development and counselling of my staff' appear on an annual report form job description? If it does appear

it is often the last item, expressed as 'supervision of staff' with '5 per cent' time allocated to it, to make up the 95% spent on the 'real job' to 100 per cent. I am not suggesting that we should all shift from getting results in our 'real' job to worrying constantly about people. But improving people is a very important part of getting results in most jobs. Perhaps there will be changes in attitudes following the Personnel Work Review[1] and wider impact of the Financial Management Initiative[2]. We live in hope.

All this may seem somewhat remote from the subject of fast stream training. It is not. Many of the people coming through the scheme now will be in senior, and perhaps very senior, positions within 10 to 20 years. Their attitudes are being formed by their present work experience, the attitudes of their senior officers and by their formal training. Anyone who plays a part in their development now needs to consider the extent to which we are really laying down the right foundations for the future. In the main we believe that we are. But it is a joint effort, with line managers, personnel divisions and the College all playing their part. We welcome suggestions for making this training better still.

[1] *Review of Personnel Work in the Civil Service,* HMSO, 1983.
[2] *Financial Management in Government Departments,* Cmnd 9058, HMSO, 1983.

Britain's Reciprocal Exchange Courses with Europe: Where Do We Go From Here?

Julie Waldron

Julie Waldron entered the Department of Health and Social Security in 1974 after studying modern languages at university. She is now a Principal and was seconded to the Civil Service College in 1982 to organise European reciprocal exchange courses.

A series of reciprocal training arrangements were made with the governments of France, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands in the early 1970s. The aim of these exchanges, from the UK's point of view, is to ensure that British officials at varying levels are familiar with the outlook, administrative structures and major languages of these European Community partners, to enable them to develop contacts with their counterparts in the French, German and Dutch governments on community, bilateral and parallel domestic questions. The courses organised for British officials in these three countries vary in length from five days to five weeks and consist of lectures, visits, discussions, individual meetings with counterparts and, in the case of France, intensive language training. The reciprocal courses organised in the UK by the European Reciprocal Training section of the Civil Service College follow similar lines.

For British officials whose primary need is for a marked improvement in their spoken French rather than an extended knowledge of

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Management in Government 1984 (1) 55–58

the French administrative system – or who wish to improve their French before attending a course in France – two intensive courses per year in administrative French are provided for the Civil Service College by the French Department of Leeds University. The concept used at Leeds is that of total immersion in the language for 11 days. The first of a similar series of courses in administrative German, although on the basis of one 11-day course per year, will be held at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology in January 1984.

The organisers try to ensure that they are in touch with departments' and individuals' needs as far as reciprocal courses are concerned and do a good deal of 'sounding' on the form and content of courses. The format of the exchange programmes with France and the Federal Republic of Germany was changed for 1982/83 in consequence of such market research to provide, in the case of France, three courses of varying length and intensity for British officials in place of two six-week courses per year. In the face of manpower cuts, it became increasingly difficult for officials to be 'spared' for as long as six weeks at one time. The new arrangements are attracting an increased number of British participants. The French Government welcomed the reciprocal opportunity for their officials to choose between a six, four or two-week course at the Civil Service College according to their fluency in English and their availability. The two-week course is aimed at those French officials who do not require intensive English language training and who wish to study a particular theme rather than follow a longer general course in the UK. The equivalent course for British officials is three weeks long and consists of one week's linguistic preparation and two weeks' study of a theme. The new pattern of German courses provides an English-speaking course and an intensive five day German-speaking individual programme, both for officers of Principal level and above. A German language course on government and administration remains, and is now open to all grades from AT upwards. The new pattern has already proved successful; both countries welcome the opportunity for non-German speakers to gain a valuable insight into the political and economic life of the Federal Republic, while the five-day programme was very well received by participants who appreciated the chance to study in depth a topic of interest to them.

In addition to its involvement in the main programme of reciprocal courses for Principals (and their French equivalents) and above, which are organised on the French side by the Institute International d'Administration Publique, the College maintains close links with the École Nationale d'Administration. Twice a year about 15 young Brit-

ish officials (from the AT/HEOD and EO to SEO grades) attend a ten-day course in France organised by ENA. They spend part of their time at the École and part in a region, after a week's preparatory course at the College on 'France and the European Community'. The counterpart of this course for French officials is the arrangement for up to five French ENA students to spend almost three months on attachment to a local authority in the UK, after a short background course at the College on central and local government in Britain.

As far as we can measure from the comments of both British and foreign participants, these exchanges are highly valued. They not only generate mutual goodwill, but also afford a unique insight into the way the government and administration work on either side of the Channel. There are often far-reaching differences in the ways in which the respective officials approach and organise their activities: they are educated and conditioned to think and work on different lines. But members of the reciprocal courses have a real opportunity to discover what makes their opposite numbers tick; through the individual part of their programmes they can usually meet and get to know their *homologues* personally. In some cases such contacts are used to good effect long after the courses are over.

There can be no substitute for personal contacts of this kind between British Civil Servants and officials of three Community countries, contacts which, through the exchange programmes, have been enthusiastically maintained despite the ups and downs of our intra-Community relations with our European partners. There is thus a strong argument for the UK to pursue these exchanges at their present level; any move to expand or intensify them would depend both on there being a proven desire on both sides for this to happen and on the willingness of line managers to release their staff so as to make an expanded programme viable. It seems that the value of the programmes varies enormously between departments according to the extent of their international responsibilities. This being so the College has given some thought to whether it should concentrate its efforts on helping these major beneficiaries further or try to extend the aims of the programmes to be more broadly educative so as to attract departments which do not benefit so directly from sending their officials on exchange courses; a major obstacle to the former idea is the limit now being placed by the major user departments on the numbers of officials they are willing (and able in financial terms) to send on any one course.

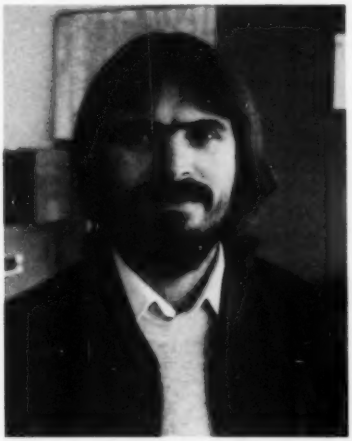
It has been said that, in this sort of business, there is always a danger that if you do not go forward you slip back. If this is the case, how can we best move forward at a time when significant increase

in expenditure on European training is probably ruled out? One option might be to shift the emphasis further away from long general courses towards more frequent short courses on particular themes. If so which themes are likely to prove more attractive to British civil servants than those tried so far? The first proposed theme course in France, on 'social policy', was in the event not run as such due to lack of support; the number of nominations for this year's proposed course in France on the control of public expenditure has been only just adequate for a viable course. We are looking for reasons why, at the moment, these themes are not meeting departmental needs. However, the theme of the English-speaking course in the Federal Republic, 'The German Economy–Federal and European factors', has been repeated because of its popularity.

A further option would be to omit or limit the amount of time spent on the courses in France on language training. A major doubt is whether we now have enough fluent French speakers to justify such a move. There is much evidence that it is mainly improved fluency in French (and in some cases German), coupled with a sound knowledge of the way in which the administrations of other European countries work, that many senior British civil servants are still anxious to acquire. Such knowledge remains under-developed in many areas of government business despite the fact that the UK has now been a member of the European Communities for more than ten years. Has the College any alternative, in planning further series of courses in Europe, but to continue to respond to this demand for language and background training and individual contacts for which departments should be continually identifying staff with these needs? At present, despite the attractions of innovation for course organisers, there appears to be no good reason to depart substantially from the mixture of courses now offered. This seems to point to a case being made for individuals who are already good language speakers but not currently involved in international work, to go on reciprocal courses partly as appetisers for this kind of work, and to build up a pool of people who have both the language and the background knowledge to make them suitable candidates for European work at some later date. For their part, the other three Community governments concerned continue to express satisfaction with the well-tried structure of the reciprocal courses organised for their officials in the UK, the most important element of which has always been regarded as being the opportunity for participants to meet their British counterparts and learn how we conduct our buisness here–and, not least of all, *why* we do it our particular way.

Management in the Civil Service: A Trainer's View and Some Research Findings

Tony Manning



Tony Manning trained as an applied behavioural scientist and subsequently lectured on the application of behavioural science to work. He has worked as a management consultant in both the public and private sectors and is now a lecturer in Management Studies at the Civil Service College.

I am employed as a Lecturer in Management Studies at the Civil Service College, in London. One of the primary functions of the Management Studies Directorate of the College is the provision of training for Civil Service managers across a range of grades and departments. In order that we fulfil this function effectively it is essential that training courses are based upon a clear understanding of the training needs of Civil Service managers. A careful study of government policy and departmental practices and procedures is one element in the process of identifying training needs.

Another equally important element is an analysis of the reality of civil service management. In other words what is necessary is information on what actual managers do, the problems that they find themselves confronted with and the skills and knowledge that they need in order to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. The remainder of this article is an account of the findings of my research into these matters.

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Management in Government 1984 (1) 59–68

The survey

In late 1981 and early 1982, I carried out a survey and wrote a report on the training needs of Civil Service managers. The basic aim of my research was to provide the Management Studies Directorate of the Civil Service College with some hard data upon which management training could be based. The survey was based on a short questionnaire which asked simple, neutral, open questions about the manager's job, the problems currently faced and the knowledge and skills required for effective performance. The questionnaire was distributed to everyone who attended a course at the Civil Service College, Sunningdale over a period of two months, irrespective of the course that they were attending. Replies were received from over 100 managers and covered a wide range of grades (from EO to AS and equivalents), jobs, departments and periods in grade. The actual response rate was not high (it appeared to be about a third, although this figure may be a serious under-estimate arising from uncertainties about the number of questionnaires actually reaching course members). The total sample was, however, reasonably large, and detailed analysis of the responses indicated that they were representative of those attending management courses at the College in terms of the departments that people came from, jobs that they carried out, etc. The replies were thus a good basis for research. A content analysis of the responses enabled me to identify certain general patterns that applied to all Civil Service managers and to highlight variations in the pattern according to the grade of the respondent. The remainder of this article goes on to describe what I found out about the manager's job, the problems currently faced by civil service managers and the knowledge and skills required by civil service managers. It is important to bear in mind that while this study highlighted some facts that were not generally appreciated, other conclusions merely confirmed what was generally thought to be the case or confirmed that managers were aware of what they ought to know.

The manager's job: goals and activities

The survey began by asking managers to say what their line managers regarded as the most important things for them to achieve in their jobs. In analysing the responses to this question I found it useful to distinguish between the *goals* that managers were expected to achieve and the *activities* that they were expected to carry out.

Managerial goals

Managerial goals were of five main kinds:

(1) being effective;

(2) being efficient;

(3) having a tightly-knit, satisfied and well-motivated workforce;

(4) maintaining satisfactory relationships with groups and subgroups within the organisation;

(5) maintaining satisfactory relationships with groups and subgroups outside the organisation.

Managers tended to be pre-occupied with questions of *effectiveness* and *efficiency.* In other words they were concerned to do what they were supposed to do and to do it with the minimum possible resources. Thus most responses referred to the provision of services, production of outputs or need to perform to certain standards. In addition, they referred to the need to do this in an efficient manner, at the lowest cost and in the shortest possible time.

The other three kinds of goal were mentioned less often and varied from job to job. The most common of the three was the *workforce* goal: managers wanted a high level of morale, job satisfaction and motivation from their staff. Some managers also expressed the need for good *intra-organisational relationships.* It was, for example, common to find references to contacts with other managers, administrators, specialists and industrials. Finally, a small group of managers were concerned with the maintenance of *extra-organisational relationships.* There were, for example, a number of references to the government, the general public, clients and contractors.

The pattern described above tended to be fairly constant across all Civil Service grades. The only significant grade differences were that the need to maintain good relationships with the general public, clients and contractors tended to be of more concern to middle and junior management, whereas the need to maintain good relations with the government was more of a senior management preoccupation.

Managerial activities

Before looking at the survey replies relating to this, it is important to recognise how managers in general achieve goals. The process of doing this can be usefully thought of as a succession of activities including goal identification, resource acquisition, work allocation, control and dealing with external influences.

Goal identification involves actually identifying or establishing

what the goals are, including the resolution of any goal conflicts. In other words it is concerned with the need to be clear about what a manager is supposed to be doing and why. The whole process by which policy is established would be subsumed under this general heading as would much industrial relations activity.

The next stage, namely, *resource acquisition* is concerned with getting the resources (including people, money, materials and ideas) needed for the achievement of goals.

The third stage of the process may be referred to as *work allocation.* This involves identifying the tasks that have to be carried out, allocating these tasks to particular individuals and dividing up the resources between them. Work allocation forms a link between organisational issues, especially organisational design and the management of change, and individual issues about job content and job design. A major consideration in the allocation of work is the actual process involved. In particular whether management decides how work is to be allocated or whether it consults with staff, negotiates with them or carries out a joint problem-solving activity.

Once goals have been identified, resources acquired and work allocated then the manager's next responsibility is to ensure that work is actually carried out and goals reached. This activity may be called *control* and is clearly one of the major components of day-to-day management.

Finally, let us look briefly at the manager's involvement in *dealing with external influences.* It was noted earlier that managers have to deal with various groups of people outside of their own particular organisation. It is, for example, common to find them dealing with the general public, clients, contractors and the government. In dealing with such external influences managers may be either reactive or proactive. In the case of the former they simply respond to the environment, whereas in the case of the latter they seek to change or influence it in some way.

Having identified the general pattern of managerial activities in the Civil Service it is important to look at variations in this pattern. The analysis of replies to the questionnaire showed clear differences in managerial activity according to grade, the most basic difference being that senior management has responsibility for carrying out a wider range of activities. This finding is in no way surprising, and

presumably arises for the obvious reason that senior management is at the top of the hierarchy overlooking the many tasks and functions for which they are responsible. In addition, senior management is more concerned with what I have called goal identification (including the resolution of goal conflicts), resource acquisition and dealing with the government as a key element in its environment. Middle and junior management, on the other hand, tends to be more pre-occupied with other elements in the environment. They must maintain satisfactory relationships with the general public, clients and contractors.

The problems currently faced by civil service managers

The survey also asked about the problems which managers in the Civil Service face at the present time. While the specific nature of the problems encountered varied considerably there were several general areas that cropped up consistently.

In the previous section it was suggested that identifying goals was a key managerial activity. This is supported by the finding that one of the more common problems encountered by managers was what social psychologists would call *'role ambiguity'*. By this I mean that managers were uncertain of what was expected of them. In particular they were unclear about such things as objectives and performance standards.

Managers frequently commented on the problems that they had with respect to *resource acquisition.* It was common to find references to the difficulties in acquiring the staff and money necessary to perform the tasks and achieve the objectives that were expected of them.

There were many problems of *organisation* that managers had to cope with. These included industrial relations problems (especially the need to consult with and negotiate with trade unions and, more generally, to resolve conflicts of interest between individuals and groups), the management of change (especially the need to manage the introduction of information technology), the co-ordination of a variety of functions and activities, the allocation of work (including delegating) and the maintenance of satisfactory relationships with groups and individuals both within and outside the organisation (including senior management, clients, contractors and the like).

Staff management, or the human aspects of management, appeared to create many problems for managers. There were many references to problems of morale, job satisfaction and motivation amongst both managers themselves and their staff. Many managers also pointed out that work pressures and lack of resources rendered

them impotent to deal with such problems although they clearly recognised their existence.

Finally, many managers made references to the problems created by the heavy workloads and *pressures of work* upon both themselves and their staff. In addition to the staff management difficulties there were many references to the problems of stress created by such pressures. Managers also spoke of the need for careful and constant time management in order to minimise the impact of such pressures and stresses.

These problems of role ambiguity, resource acquisition, organisation, staff management and pressures of work were found in all civil service grades. Some of them do, however, appear to be more characteristic of one part of the management hierarchy than of others. Thus senior management were more likely to be confronted by certain kinds of organisational problems, especially industrial relations, the management of change and the co-ordinating of various functions and activities. In contrast, middle management was characterised by increased uncertainty about objectives and standards, by the need to translate these (often vague) objectives into specific tasks and by the need to manage the people carrying out such tasks in an effective and efficient manner. Finally, junior management were expected to cope with problems at the 'sharp end' or 'coal face'. They tended to be pre-occupied with the problems of staff management, motivation and development, as well as with the pressures and stresses created by being in the middle of a complex network of relationships (both within and outside of the Civil Service).

The knowledge and skills required by civil service managers

In the final part of the survey I asked managers to identify the knowledge and skills that they required. This was the area that was of particular interest to me as a trainer. Its relevance does, however, extend beyond the world of training. It is, for example, important across the whole area of personnel management, especially for such things as recruitment, selection, promotion and career development. The success of all of these activities depends, in part of least, on there being a clear understanding of the knowledge and skills required in particular jobs.

Knowledge

Managers in the Civil Service need knowledge of the following five things in order to function effectively and efficiently: the organisational context, organisation and management theory, specialist or technical matters, the financial context and staff management.

The need to locate management activity in its proper organisational context has been stressed for many years by those working in management education and training. My survey confirmed that managers recognised this basic point. It was, for example, common to find them asking for information on such things as the objectives of their department (or some part thereof), the way in which they should interact with their environment and the industrial relations system (including the Whitley system) of which they are a part.

Managers also felt that they needed some theoretical basis for managing such organisations. They expressed a special interest in the following aspects of *organisation and management theory:* organisational design, work allocation (including delegation), job design and the management of change (in particular the introduction of information technology).

It was apparent that there was a considerable variety of management jobs. It was, therefore, hardly surprising to find many requests for *specialist or technical information* relating to their own jobs.

Managers clearly recognised the importance of financial constraints upon their work. This was reflected in the numerous references to information upon both the *financial context* of management and the management of financial resources.

Finally, managers wanted to know about *staff management.* At the most general level they simply asked for information on 'staff management'. At a more specific level their requests focussed on such things as the job satisfaction, motivation and development of staff. Finally, there were quite specific references to certain types of staff management problems, such as welfare or discipline.

In earlier sections of this article I discussed how the manager's job and the sorts of problems that it involves vary according to the grade of the manager. The same sort of grade differentiation also applies to the knowledge needed by managers. My survey confirmed what many managers and management trainers would, no doubt, have expected, namely, that senior managers were more likely to need to know about the organisational context, organisation and management theory and the financial context. In contrast, junior management needs specialist or technical knowledge related to its own specific area of work.

Skills

Managers in the Civil Service need to possess a number of skills in order to function effectively and efficiently.

The importance of good *communication skills* was recognised by many managers. The actual terms chosen varied widely and included references to communication itself, as well as to more specific skills like presenting information, giving a talk, effective writing and effective speaking.

In addition to the relatively formal skills referred to in the previous paragraph, it was common to find managers emphasising the value of *social, interpersonal or interactive skills.* I included under this heading quite specific skills like listening, being tactful and being sensitive, as well as more general things like interviewing, influencing and social skills.

There were frequent references to the need to develop *decision-making and problem-solving skills.* Some managers actually used these terms while others referred to more specific skills like analysing, working out priorities, identifying objectives, evaluating and planning.

The need to develop *skills in group work* was also recognised by many managers. There were, for example, a number of references to such things as working in groups, team building and contributing to and running meetings.

Some managers also referred to the importance of *consultation and negotiation skills.* In so doing they clearly recognised the interrelationship between good management and good industrial relations.

Finally, there were many references to quite specific *technical or specialist skills.* The actual skills mentioned varied widely according to the job being performed by the individual manager.

The skills required by managers at different grades were found to vary in a fairly predictable manner. Thus consultation, negotiation and running meetings were more important for senior management; group work and teambuilding were more important for middle management; and job-specific, technical or specialist skills were more important for junior management. In addition I found certain skill areas confined almost entirely to specific grades. In particular the skills associated with information technology cropped up mainly in the middle management grades while many junior managers pointed to the need to develop skills in coping with the high levels of stress that characterised their jobs.

Summary and conclusions

In this article I have attempted to outline the nature of management in the Civil Service as seen from the viewpoint of a trainer. This

account has been based largely upon the findings of a survey that I carried out into the training needs of civil service managers. From this survey I have been able to draw a number of general conclusions about managers' jobs, the problems that they face and the knowledge and skills that they require. In addition to such general conclusions I was also able to identify variations in the pattern according to the manager's position in the organisational hierarchy.

The survey upon which these findings are based was carried out in order that training within the Management Studies Directorate of the Civil Service College could be based upon an accurate account of the training needs of civil service managers. The survey findings have contributed towards this end. Let me give a few examples in order to illustrate this point.

For a number of years now management courses at the Civil Service College have clearly recognised that management training must focus upon the organisational context within which managers perform: management does not take place in a social, economic and political vacuum. At the same time we also believe that an awareness of the organisational context and an understanding of organisation theory is of particular significance to managers at the most senior positions within the hierarchy. These points may seem obvious but it is important to recognise that much traditional management training is concerned with the development of decision-making, problem-solving, communication or interpersonal skills that are taken to be the same *irrespective* of such things as the organisation and its context, the level within the organisation that the manager is operating at and such like. This survey has helped to confirm that our working assumptions are correct. We now have hard data to back our beliefs. It is, however, important to recognise that the survey did more than merely confirm our beliefs or prejudices. It also told us things that we were not aware of or had not thought through fully. It revealed, for example, some important training needs that were not adequately dealt with on existing courses. Thus, for example, work allocation (including delegation), time management and stress management have been highlighted as important problem areas. Our response to this has been to develop a whole range of new and improved teaching materials that enable us to meet the training needs in these areas.

While it has been possible to feed back the survey findings into the design of our courses, it is important to recognise that a training solution is only appropriate if the underlying problem is a training problem. In other words as trainers we must be sure that the problems arise because staff lack certain knowledge and skills which they

could best acquire through training. I mention this because, in my opinion, many of the problems (for example, problems of role ambiguity, poor morale and industrial relations) are not training problems but organisational problems and, as such, require organisational solutions.

Is the Civil Service Interested in Information Technology?

J Stone

Jim Stone is a Senior Lecturer on loan to the Directorate of Systems Training of the Civil Service College managing a range of courses dealing with the implementation of computer-based systems.

If a measure of the interest is the attendance at seminars, I would answer 'Yes'. During the last two years the Directorate of Systems Training of the Civil Service College has mounted more than 80 one-day Information Technology Awareness seminars at locations around the country to audiences totalling over 7,000 civil servants. What about the 500,000–plus civil servants who have not attended one of our seminars? Of course our own efforts to promote an informed awareness of the technology and its applications are only part of the overall activity seeking to support the beneficial and cost-effective implementation of information technology products in the Civil Service. The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency has launched a number of initiatives in its role as the body with primary responsibility for promoting the use of IT in government. The Department of Trade and Industry has funded many pilot projects in the public service. Some of the departments involved in running pilot projects have their own training programmes.

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Management in Government 1984 (1) 69–74

Technology breakthroughs lead to office automation

Why all this fuss? Because we are at a point where the demand for greater efficiency and effectiveness in administration seems capable of being satisfied, at least in part, by the advent of promising new products. Breakthroughs in technology in the areas of computer processing, storage and telecommunications have led to the production of a range of products promising viable office automation systems. These offer the chance to reduce costs and paperwork, increase productivity, improve quality and communications by providing:

- word processing
- calculation and budgeting facilities
- electronic mail
- diary and calendar systems
- access to data held on other computers
- accounting and inventory systems
- viewdata/teletex facilities

Our current manual and mechanical activities of accounting, paper handling, filing, mailing and copying potentially lend themselves to automation. The costs of electronically handling paperwork have dropped substantially (and are projected to continue dropping) compared to the rising costs of the use of people for these processes.

In the Civil Service as well as in industry and commerce, information technology is believed to have reached a point where it promises improvements in productivity at all levels of management. Such improvements can be both qualitative and quantitative. At operational levels it promises increased throughput coupled with speedier service and greater accuracy. At middle and senior manager levels it promises aid in the decision-making and control processes.

Aim of Systems Training Directorate

The aim of the Directorate has been to help inform the staff who might be involved in the identification, management and operation of information technology systems. The seminars help to promote an informed awareness of the range of available products in the areas of data, text, image and voice processing and to plot the future trends. We also try to help participants to identify those areas of their administrative activities which are most likely to benefit from electronic assistance.

Manufacturers' promotional activities tend to stress the cheapness of the hardware involved. Our aim is to help people cost the con-

siderable extra investment required in the purchase or development of software, in electrical power and environmental provisions, in provision of training, in extra furniture and in the additional management effort needed; and to pinpoint the areas of work in which benefit is most likely to justify this level of investment.

In a period of economic restraint it is essential that the Civil Service takes advantage of any and every opportunity to improve its effectiveness and efficiency and reduce its costs.

But using new products and systems implies a degree of risk; there will be successes but some mistakes will also be made. It is important therefore that the key points of successful implementation are highlighted; it is equally important that mistakes and problems are identified and the lessons arising learned and made known.

The aim of the seminars is not to promote information technology products as such but to help improve Civil Service administrative practices by encouraging participants to think about their own areas of work and the potential benefits the technology might offer in them. Improvements in performance are more likely to occur if all concerned–operational management as well as management services divisions–are able to give thought to potential applications and their initiation. There is a need for top management to plan the strategy of introducing information technology, but opportunities do exist for local management initiative in identifying both opportunities and problem areas.

Organisation of the seminars

In setting up the seminars the Directorate of Systems Training made the decision to reach as many staff as possible, as economically as possible. We attempted to achieve this by taking the seminars to the areas where staff in a range of departments are located rather than expecting them to come to us. Figure 1 shows details of the 56 seminars run during academic year 1982/83 at 38 different locations. The seminars have been supported by a course book professionally produced for the purpose and given to each participant; a number of relevant films are shown to illustrate the range of equipment involved and the opportunity of actually using it is offered during lunch-time demonstrations. The seminars have been generally well received and many requests have been received from outside organisations for copies of the course book.

Looking again through the list is a reminder of the large audiences we sometimes had to cope with and the difficulty we had in getting suitable premises, Audio-visual facilities and demonstrations of equipment also presented problems. The Civil Service does not have

Figure 1: 1982/83 Seminars – Directorate of Systems Training Information Technology Awareness

Location	No. of seminars	Total attendance
Norwich	3	217
Durham	1	50
Newcastle	2	56
Cambridge	1	22
Chelmsford	1	28
Exeter	1	47
London	13	993
Bath	1	73
Bristol	1	70
Nottingham	2	89
Leicester	1	24
Edinburgh	2	319
Stirling	1	30
Telford	1	136
Milton Keynes	1	25
Swansea	1	57
Cardiff	1	60
Cheltenham	1	127
Brighton	1	75
Southampton	1	111
Aberystwyth	1	53
Bangor	1	31
York	1	100
Manchester	1	134
Lancaster	1	145
Truro	1	42
Chester	1	98
Plymouth	1	116
Birmingham	1	86
Croydon	1	131
Glasgow	1	105
Sheffield	1	56
Leeds	1	57
Liverpool	2	232
Reading	1	66
Basingstoke	1	41
Canterbury	1	50
Farnborough	1	81
	56	4,233

a grade of 'road-manager' nor does it run to providing halls big enough to cope with up to 200 people. We had to hire halls, equipment and audio-visual facilities, usually unseen until early on the morning of the seminar and sometimes with unfortunate results. In Edinburgh for one seminar we were located in Unit 2 of the three-unit cinema. In the afternoon, lectures had to compete with sound-

track music from the adjoining matinee in Unit 1! Worse was to follow. It soon became clear from mumblings amongst our audience that all was not as expected. Enquiry elicited that we had gained 20 extra 'students' who had paid good Scottish money to see 'ET' (the extra-terrestrial), not to hear about 'IT'! We never did find out whether a number of Edinburgh based civil servants sat through a free film show in government sponsored time!

Reactions

The level of attendance is one measure of interest. A more qualitative measure is the questions which occur at the seminars. There is a level of interest in the technology and a search for guidance in its effective use, as well as for help in choosing personal computers! However the major interest lies in social, economic and ergonomic factors. Most staff are genuinely interested in equipment which will make them more productive, add job interest, give them a new skill or merely reduce drudgery. But where there is a perceived threat to skills, social status, career prospects or even health then natural fear and resistance are aroused.

From our experience there is a high level of awareness of the issues involved. The trade unions have done a good deal of work in putting over information and views about IT to their members. As lecturers we can help those attending courses to explore their attitudes to change, and define areas and reasons for possible resistance or pre-requisites for approval. We do not have the authority to make promises, although we can point out the positive measures which civil service management have taken. The effect of tighter budgets on morale has also been reflected in a belief that the solution to any problem which involves expenditure is unlikely to gain approval! This is generally balanced by some seminar members who have received or who are about to receive equipment. This raises one of the benefits of seminars not being confined to any one department. For most people their departmental experience colours their view of the Civil Service as a whole; the shared experience with people from other departments is often beneficial and helps promote a more balanced view.

Further seminars

A further 20 seminars will be run in academic year 1983/84. The course book is being revised to include information on the equipment now becoming available and to reflect the experience arising

from installed information technology systems. Anyone interested in having a seminar run in a particular location, or in further training in this field, should contact Jim Stone of the Directorate of Systems Training on 01–834 6644, extension 408 (GTN 2803–408).

Royal Commissions and Departmental Committees of Inquiry

The Editor's attention has recently been drawn to a publication likely to be of interest to many readers of *Management in Government.* This is a summary of the proceedings of a seminar which the Royal Institute of Public Administration sponsored in December 1982 on royal commissions and departmental committees of inquiry. Participants in this seminar included a number of members of royal commissions and departmental committees, both past and present. The seminar discussed the lessons learnt from experience, attempted to distil some practical points of guidance for the benefit of future commissions and also considered rather broader questions of purpose, composition, method of working and impact.

Publication details are:

Royal Commissions and Departmental Committees of Inquiry: The lessons of experience by Dr Martin Bulmer published by the Royal Institute of Public Administration on 28 September 1983. Price £2.50 (£2.00 RIPA members) ISBN 0 900628 31 6.

Civil Service College Courses and Seminars

The Civil Service College runs a wide range of courses and seminars, many of which are open to both civil servants and people outside government. A small selection of the courses due to be held between May and July 1984 are shown with a contact point for further information.

Course Title	*Dates*
Organisational change	14–18 May 1984
Introduction to industrial relations for senior staff	21–25 May 1984
Managing effective teams	4–8 June 1984
Industrial relations for middle managers	25–29 June 1984
Managing technological change	2–6 July 1984
Consultation and negotiation	9–13 July 1984

Contact: Mrs M Blaydon, Civil Service College
Sunningdale Park, Ascot, Berks SL5 OQE
Telephone: Ascot (0990) 23444 ext 352 or GTN 2092 352

How the British economy works	30 April–4 May 1984
Private and public allocation	14–16 May 1984
Government and industry study group	14–18 May 1984
Introduction to economics	4–29 June 1984 (2 separate 2-week modules)
Introduction to the UK financial system	2–6 July 1984
Britain's international economic relations	2–6 July 1984

Contact: Mrs V H Stamler, Civil Service College
11 Belgrave Road, London SW1V 1RB
Telephone: 01–834 6644 ext 436 or GTN 2803 436

Output measures and performance indicators	2–4 May 1984
Efficient administration in government	8–19 May 1984
Techniques to improve decision making	9–11 May 1984

Contact: Miss J Erwteman, Civil Service College
11 Belgrave Road, London SW1V 1RB
Telephone: 01 834 6644 ext 229 or GTN 2803 229

US Foreign policy	3 May 1984
The international trading environment	17 May 1984

Contact: Mrs M Ward, Civil Service College
Sunningdale Park, Ascot, Berks SL5 OQE
Telephone: Ascot (0990) 23444 ext 296

Computer systems procurement	30 April – 4 May 1984
	11 – 15 June 1984
Developing office technology systems	14 – 18 May 1984
	25 – 29 June 1984
Appreciation of the O & M process	14 – 18 May 1984
Basic assignment skills and strategy	15 – 17 May 1984
	19 – 21 June 1984
	24 – 26 July 1984
Information systems security	21 – 24 May 1984
	26 – 29 June 1984
Forms design for management	10 – 11 July 1984
	19 – 20 July 1984

Contact: Mr A Ruston, Civil Service College
11 Belgrave Road, London SW1V 1RB
Telephone: 01-834 6644 ext 374 or GTN 2803 374.

Printed in Scotland for Her Majesty's Stationery Office by HMSO Press, Edinburgh
Dd 0736873 C33 2/84 (214353)

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ISBN 0 11 722719 6
ISSN 0263-4678

HMSO